

THE
MYSTERIES
OF THE
COURT OF LONDON



BY
George W. M. REYNOLDS

THE SUPERIOR WATCH Co.,

79 Box No. 167 :: ::

MADRAS

Third Series.

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Mysteries
OF THE
Court of London

BY

G. W. M. REYNOLDS.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER.	PAGE.
XIII A Glimpse at the Past ...	1
XIV Fresh Adventures on the same night ...	5
XV The Grand Entertainment ...	12
XVI Lady Bess ...	19
XVII The Lawyers ...	23
XVIII The Messenger Bird ...	28
XIX The Journey ...	32
XX The Result ...	35
XXI Behind the Scenes ...	43
XXII Henrietta Leyden ...	49
XXIII The Visitor ...	55
XXIV The Preceptor and his Pupil ...	62
XXV A Strange Scene ...	67
XXVI The Fabrication ...	73
XXVII The Sisters ...	80
XXVIII The Lady and the Page ...	85
XXIX The Lady's-Maid—The Stolen Interview ...	93
XXX Florina ...	104
XXXI A Night Adventure ...	109
XXXII Dr. Ferney ...	120
XXXIII The Listeners ...	129
XXXIV The Mirror ...	134
XXXV The Snare ...	141
XXXVI Beech-Tree Lodge ...	145
XXXVII Mysterious Occurrences ...	150
XXXVIII The Masquerade ...	159
XXXIX The Garden ...	167
XL The Duel ...	173
XLI More Scenes at Saxondale House ...	178
XLII The Billet ...	183
XLIII Lady Bess's enterprise ...	189
XLIV The Barge ...	198
XLV The Lady of Many Lovers ...	204
XLVI The Ransacking of the Wardrobe Room ...	210
XLVII A Startling Discovery—The Portrait ...	217
XLVIII The Brother and Sister ...	224
XLIX The Diplomatist Mystified ...	230
L The Invalid ...	235
LI Following up the Clue ...	240
LII The Oath proposed ...	249

THIRD SERIES.

The Mysteries OF The Court of London

VOLUME X.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GLANCE AT THE PAST.

WHATEVER intention Madge Somers might have had a few minutes back, of entering into full particulars with Chifflin the Cannibal as to the cause of her singular behaviour towards Lord Saxondale, she had come to a very opposite resolution by the time she returned to him. In short, for reasons best known to herself, she had entirely changed her mind, and determined to keep her own counsel. At the same time there were certain particulars to which he had briefly alluded when they were crossing the field together, and respecting which she was anxious to obtain the fullest and completest explanations. Madge Somers therefore felt that she had a difficult game to play with the formidable Chifflin, and that it would require all her arts of diplomacy to effect the double object of satisfying him in respect to her own conduct, and at the same time gleanings what she wanted to know from his lips.

"You are enjoying yourself," she said, flinging off her old cloak and sitting down near the table.

"Well, I think it wants something to put one in a good humour after this disappointment," growled the Cannibal. "But it wasn't for a glass of brandy-and-water that I came up here to-night, I can tell you," he added. "Who's to pay me the hundred pounds I have just lost by your silly nonsense

in letting that young fellow go? For I hav'n't forgot that you said just now my share would come to that amount."

"Now, Chifflin," answered Madge Somers, "you have known me some years, and I have never deceived you in business matters—have I?"

"No—I can't say that you have," responded the Cannibal sullenly. "We have done a few things together, and you have always been fair and straightforward enough—there's no denying that: and now, what next?"

"You will believe me, then, if I make you a certain promise?" said Madge interrogatively.

"Yes—I think I may," replied Chifflin: "for we all know you are a strange kind of a creature, and there's some of the folks down at Sol Patch's really fancies you are a witch. I don't mean no offence, Madge—"

"Witches need not have recourse to the means I adopt for a living," rejoined the woman abruptly. "But about this promise of mine. If I tell you that to-morrow evening at nine o'clock I will bring you a hundred pounds to the *Billy Goat*, or anywhere else you choose to appoint, will you be satisfied for the loss of your booty this night? And I think you ought to be," she added ere he had time to answer; "for it will be a hundred pounds earned by you without risk, whereas if this work had been done to-night there would have been risk, although everything was so nicely arranged to make all traces disappear."

"Well, if I was sure of having the blunt to-morrow night," said Chifflin,

slowly suffering himself to be pacified, "I shouldn't care much about that young fellow being allowed to walk clean off under my very nose as one may say."

"Then you shall have the hundred pounds to-morrow night, Chiffin," said Madge Somers, with the confidence of one who knows that the promise will be fulfilled.

"And now you will tell me," asked the Cannibal, "what the deuce all this means—why you dropped the candle and called out—why you pushed me from the room and banged the door as a signal that I wasn't wanted—and why you let the young chap escape at all."

"Did you not see that he opened his eyes all in a moment, just as we were bending over the bed?" asked Madge.

"No—that I didn't!" replied Chiffin gruffly; "and if he did open his eyes like that, then all I can say is I can't believe mine—because it seemed to me that he was asleep as a rock."

"Well, then," rejoined Madge doggedly, "I can tell you that he did. I was closest to him and I saw him open his eyes."

"And suppose he did," exclaimed Chiffin, "What then? why did that prevent us from doing his business?"

"I don't know how it was, but a sudden weakness came upon me," answered Madge, "I could not find it in my heart—"

"Oh! that be hanged!" growled Chiffin, "I don't believe it for a minute—it's all nonsense. A sudden weakness over you, Madge? Why, you must take me for a downright fool—"

"Never mind what I take you for, Chiffin," interrupted the woman, with a look and manner which showed that she was not to be frightened by him: "I tell you that some strange feeling of remorse, or pity, or fear—I don't know which it was—but perhaps all three united—came over me at the time, and I could not possibly do the deed or yet let it be done. It seemed as if an invisible hand was stretched out to save him—"

"Well, I don't know what to think of it," observed Chiffin sullenly: "it's a strange story, Madge, to come from your lips."

"And I am a strange woman too—am I not?" she demanded abruptly. "You yourself said so just now?"

"And so you are—and it's perhaps

on that account you suddenly took it into you queer head to let the young fellow go. Well," he continued, refilling his glass with brandy-and-water, "I suppose what you say must be the case; and if you only keep your word and come down with the blunt to-morrow night, I shan't bother myself any longer about your strange conduct of just now."

"You may rely upon my punctuality," said Madge. "At nine o'clock I will be in Agar Town. But while we were crossing the field, you said something about having done business for one of the Saxondale family several years ago."

"And so I did," answered Chiffin; "and now I recollect, it was just about this time nineteen years back. But it wasn't exactly for any one bearing the name of Saxondale—the old lord was alive then—and this covey who was here to-night was only just born."

"I recollect you mentioned the name of a person called Farefield," said Madge.

"Yes—Ralph Farefield," rejoined Chiffin: "it was him that employed me. Ah! it is a rum affair altogether, and I never could make out how that Ralph Farefield came by his death."

"A strange affair, was it?" said Madge Somers. Come, Chiffin, your glass is empty; and although it's late you are accustomed to sit up, and we may as well have a friendly chat while we are about it. Besides, I mean to have a glass myself. So come, refill your own."

"I don't mind if I do," said Chiffin, suiting the action to the word.

"Let's see—what were we talking about?" said Madge, who had likewise brewed a glass for herself. "Oh! I remember—that strange story of the Saxondale family nineteen years ago. Come, I am just in a humour for a good gossip to-night."

"Then it's a very strange humour of yours, Madge," said Chiffin; "for generally speaking you ain't accustomed to talk more than is necessary."

"Oh! but people are not always in the same humour," said the woman.

"Well that's true," remarked Chiffin. "I myself don't generally chatter and talk about my exploits, except when I am preciously in the wind—and then I let out everything. Did I ever tell you," asked the ruffian, on whom, the frequent potations of brandy-and-water were producing an

effect, "how it was I come to be called the Cannibal?"

"Yes—you have told me that story," returned Madge; and it is precisely because you told it so well, that I want to know about this other business of which you are speaking—I mean the Saxondale affair."

"Well, come, I will tell you all about it," said the Cannibal. "You must know that Ralph Farefield was the old lord's nephew, and was a sad wild fellow, who ran through a lot of money and spoke ill of his uncle. So the old lord was resolved to cut him out, and went and married a young girl all in a great hurry. By her he had three children—two daughters and a son. Now this didn't suit Mr. Ralph's book at all, because the little Edmund would succeed to the peerage and estates. So Ralph determined to have him made away with; and somehow or other he found me out. Well, I wasn't over particular, and Ralph had gold enough to tempt me: besides which I looked to the future, and thought that if through me Ralph got to be Lord Saxondale it would be as good as a pension as long as I lived. So I soon fell into Ralph's plans, and agreed to act. I and some of my pals were to go down into Lincolnshire, carry off the brat, poison it and then leave the body in some public place where it was sure to be seen; because, don't you understand, Mr. Ralph could scarcely claim to be the heir unless the death of little Edmund was proved? Well, me and the pals went down into Lincolnshire; but for some days we didn't succeed—and as I began to fear that so many suspicious-looking fellows lurking about might cause an alarm and spoil the whole game, I told them to pack off to Gainsborough, which was only a few miles away, and there wait for me."

Here Chiffin paused to imbibe some more alcoholic fluid, which having done, he pursued his narrative in the following manner:

"The moment I began to act alone, I had good luck: for I succeeded in carrying off the child from its nurse. I had a black mask on my face and frightened the poor girl terribly—so that she fell down in a fit, while I ran away as hard as I could with the baby in my arms. I soon slipped the mask off my face, and made straight for a grove that I saw at a distance. Having reached it, I sat down to rest, and also to do the remainder of my work

—which was to kill the child and strip it of its outer clothes so as to give Ralph Farefield a proof that I had fulfilled his mission. But when I felt in my pocket for the little phial of poison, I found it broke; and so I thought to myself there was nothing left to do but to tie a string round the little creature's neck and strangle it. However, I began stripping the clothes off first, stuffing them into my pockets as I did so; and then I noticed that the child had the mark of a strawberry on its neck. A very singular mark it was—so singular that I couldn't help looking at it, though it was but a tiny mark, not so big as a sixpence. Well, I had just torn off a string from the child's petticoat and was going to fasten it round his neck—for he was crying a great deal and I wanted to put an end to the business at once—when all of a sudden I heard the voices of several men close by: but I could not immediately see who they were, on account of the thickness of the foliage. Well, thought I to myself, there was a chase after the child, and if I was caught stripping it and with its clothes in my pocket too, I should swing for it! So dropping the brat in a jiffey, I started up and rushed away quite in a different direction from the one where I had heard the voices. Just as I got out of the grove, however, I ran against a great tall hulking gipsy-man with a large stick in his hand. He cried out in a savage manner, asking what the deuce I meant by running against him like that; and then he gave me a good tap with his stick—in return for which I knocked him down with my bludgeon. But the next moment I had four or five other gipsy-men at my heels, who came rushing out of the grove on hearing the disturbance. So, not choosing to stay and fight with such numbers, I cut off as fast as my legs would carry me. They did not pursue me far; and I got clear away. I then sat down, and began to reflect what I should do—whether I should go back and endeavour to regain possession of the child or not; for I now felt quite sure that the voices which had alarmed me were those of the gipsy-men and not of any persons in search of the bantling. But then I thought that if I returned into the grove, the gipsies would either beat me to death for having knocked down their comrade; or else out of revenge and perhaps with the hope of reward

go and hand me over to the constables of the nearest town for having stolen and stripped a child. So I was obliged to come to the resolution of leaving things to take their chance, and telling Ralph Farefield the most plausible story I could invent to satisfy him. I accordingly made the best of the way to Gainsborough, and joining my companions at the boozing-ken where they had put up, told them what had happened. We then took separate roads, and hastened back to London. There I told Mr. Farefield that I had killed the child, and left it in a place where it was very likely to be discovered. As a proof of the story I displayed the clothes stripped off the bantling, and which fortunately were marked with the name of the *Hon. Edmund Farefield*. I also told him about the strawberry mark—and altogether he was satisfied."

Here the Cannibal again paused to refresh himself with more brandy-and-water; and having refilled his glass ready for farther use, he went on thus:—

"A month passed away after the adventure down in Lincolnshire, and as it seemed that nothing was heard about the child, and it did not turn up, I felt pretty sure that either the gypsies had taken it away with them without stopping in the neighbourhood to ascertain whose child was lost or else that they had left it to its fate in the grove. Or again, it likewise occurred to me that they might not have seen it at all. However, certain sure it was that the child continued missing, as I learnt from Ralph Farefield, who came to question me more particularly about the business. It was a little more than a month after the adventure, when I one day saw in a newspaper that old Lord Saxondale was lying at the point of death down at the castle in Lincolnshire so I went off to Mr. Farefield's lodgings to let him know: but I found he had gone down into Lincolnshire the day before. Then it struck me that if the old lord should not happen to die of that bout, it might answer Ralph Farefield's purposes if me and my pals were to get into the castle and knock his venerable lordship on the head in the middle of the night. Away we went therefore into Lincolnshire to offer our services to Ralph in that respect; but on arriving in the neighbourhood we heard that the old lord

was dead, that Lady Saxondale had recovered her child and that Ralph Farefield had gone away suddenly in the middle of the very same night of his arrival. Well, I was not over much surprised at hearing that her ladyship had got back the child, knowing what I did about its original loss. I was however terribly put out to think that it was all up with Mr. Ralph: so me and my pals consulted what we should do rather than go back empty-handed to London. In short, we determined upon a crack in the castle, and accordingly broke in at night. An alarm was raised—we found our way to some vaults underneath the chapel—and there what do you think we discovered? You would never guess. The dead body of Ralph Farefield, floating about in the water that had flooded the vaults!"

"Had he been murdered, then?" asked Madge Sensors, who listened with a deep interest to the narrative.

"There was no appearance of it," responded Chiffi; "and indeed from what a surgeon afterwards said, there was every reason to believe the contrary—I mean to say, that it was an accident by which he was drowned, but how he came into the vault heaven only knows! Me and me pals took from about his person all he had in money and jewellery, and left the body lying on the steps leading down into the vault. We then got out of the castle as best we could, and betook ourselves to Gainsborough, where we put up at the boozing-ken that I mentioned just now, and which was kept by a fellow of the right sort. You recollect I told you that when me and my pals were first down in Lincolnshire about Farefield's business, I sent them to Gainsborough while I tried my hand alone at carrying off the child. On that occasion they put up at the boozing-ken I am speaking about; and there they happened to fall in with a resurrectionist chap, whom they had known in London and who had been doing a stroke of business at his trade—body-lifting, I mean—down in Lincolnshire. It was to try and find this fellow again that we betook ourselves to the boozing-ken after our adventure inside Saxondale Castle: because at that time stiff'uns were very scarce in the market and fetched a deuced good price. The laws were very severe then against resurrection-men; and enterprising surgeons who wanted a *subject*, didn't

mind giving twenty, thirty, or even forty guineas. Now you begin to understand why me and my pals stopped at Gainsborough to find out Bob Shakerly the body-snatcher. Well, we did succeed in meeting with him, and told him that we knew of where there was a nice stiff'un, pretty fresh, and we thought might be had with a little trouble. So he then told us that there was a young doctor from London stopping in Gainsborough at the moment—of the name of Ferney, and who had quite a mania for *subjects*. Well, Bob Shakerly went and saw the doctor, and told him what a prize might be had if he chose to give a decent sum for it. This he at once agreed to do; and our arrangements were made accordingly. Me and my pals determined to penetrate once more into the castle and get out the body; for we saw the means of doing it without running any particular risk of discovery. On his side Bob Shakerly agreed to be in the wood close by the castle with a horse and cart in the middle of the night; and things being thus settled, we set to work without delay. You have never been down in that part of Lincolnshire, have you?"

"No—never," answered Madge.

"Well, Saxondale Castle is an immense building, and at least half of it was shut up in those times," continued the Cannibal. "I don't know anything about it now. All we learnt the first time of our breaking in had taught us how to do things better on this second occasion: so we clambered up to one of the windows that overlooked the River Trent, and got into the uninhabited part that way. We went down into the vaults and found the body just where we had left it lying on the steps. One would have thought the rats must have begun to make a meal upon it; but it was quite otherwise—the stiff'un was as fresh and as perfect as when we dragged it out of the water two nights before. Well, we got it up the stone stairs into a sort of vestry-place opening out of the chapel. There we put it into one of those precious big sacks that resurrectionists have for the purpose, and lowered it by ropes out of the window by which we had got in. Our own escape was made without exciting any alarm in the building: and we got the stiff'un safe way into the wood where Bob Shakerly was waiting with a horse and cart. He then drove off to Gainsborough, while me and my pals followed on foot. Dr.

Ferney paid the price agreed upon: and though when it came to be divided amongst us all, our shares weren't very great, yet it was a matter of eight pound apiece—and that was better than nothing. Me and my pals came back to London, and sold Ralph Farefield's jewellery to Solomon Patch. So, all things considering, we did not return quite empty-handed."

"And that is all you have to tell me?" observed Madge Somers, as Chiflin the Cannibal left off speaking.

"Yes—that's all, and enough too I should think," he answered with one of his grim smiles. "Wasn't it a precious string of adventures? But by the by, I may tell you that the Dr. Ferney I have been speaking about, has since become a very celebrated man. Bob Shakerly told me so. Ah! Bob's an old man now, and does nothing in the resurrection line: *subjects* have got so precious cheap since the law was altered, and doctors can get hold of poor people that die in hospitals, and workhouse paupers, and convicts. But Bob is doing pretty well though, in another line: he keeps a knacker's yard down at Cow Cross—Sharp's Alley, I think it is—you must know whereabouts I mean? So having dug up human bodies for the doctors to dissect, he now buys old horses which he dissects himself for cat's-meat and sausages. But it's precious late, Madge and I think I have had quite enough brandy-and-water: so I will be off. But don't forget to be down at Patch's to-morrow night at nine o'clock—or else you and me are very likely to fall out."

"You know that when I promise I always fulfil my undertaking," replied Madge Somers."

"To be sure; I don't doubt you" said Chiflin. "And now good night."

"Good night," answered the woman: and the Cannibal took his departure.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRESH ADVENTURES ON THE SAME NIGHT.

We left Lord Saxondale at the moment when, having quitted the hut in the precipitate manner already described, he had gained the Seven Sisters Road. It was not in a very lonely part that he now found himself,

for *Hornsey Wood Tavern* was within five minutes' walk in one direction, and ten minutes would bring him to the houses in *Hornsey Road* in another direction. He thought the best thing he could do would be to proceed to the tavern, knock the people up, and procure a bed for the remainder of the night. But while he paused for a few moments in the middle of the road to reflect whether he should adopt this course, or make the best of his way back into London, his ear caught the quick trappings of a steed approaching from the direction of the metropolis. Almost immediately afterwards the horseman came up to the spot where *Saxondale* was loitering; and although proceeding at the time at full gallop, he suddenly reined in his steed so that it came up to a dead halt.

The reader will remember that it was a clear starlight night; and *Saxondale* was therefore enabled to perceive that the stranger who had thus stopped so abruptly had the appearance of a young man very handsomely dressed: but he could see little of his countenance, inasmuch as a great shawl-kerchief, tied round the neck, reached almost up to the nose—while the hat, which had large brims, was drawn low over the forehead. The steed which the traveller bestrode was a magnificent animal; and though evidently docile and obedient to the will of its rider, it nevertheless began pawing the ground with some little degree of impatience at thus being checked in the full career which seemed best suited to its high mettle.

"You are out late to-night sir," said the horseman, whose voice, though sounding with somewhat muffled accents through the folds of the shawl-neckkerchief, was nevertheless mild and agreeable.

"Yes," answered *Saxondale*, who was just in that frame of mind to be by no means displeased at meeting some one to talk to, after an adventure which had been fraught with so much terror, and the influence of which still lingering upon his mind, made the road seem more lonely and the silence of the night more ominous than under other circumstances they would have appeared. "But I may make the same observation in respect to you. We are both late. It must be considerably past twelve o'clock;"—and pulling out his watch, he exclaimed it by the starlight. "Near one, I declare!"

"Which way lies your road?" inquired the traveller, scrutinizing the young nobleman from beneath the overhanging brim of his hat.

"To tell you the truth," answered *Saxondale*, with a laugh, "I am hightid, as it were, and was just thinking of going up to the tavern yonder and procuring a bed, when as I was crossing the road you galloped up to the spot."

"It is ten to one that the people will not open their place for you up there at this hour," rejoined the horseman, pointing with his riding-whip towards the tavern upon the neighbouring eminence. "But my house is little more than a mile hence; and if you will condescend to accept such hospitality as I can afford, a bed is cheerful at your service. I may observe that I have as pretty a little villa-residence further along the road here, towards *Edmonton*, as you will see anywhere in this district."

The offer was made with such frank courtesy, and the traveller altogether seemed to be of such genteel and prepossessing appearance, though little of his countenance could be discerned, that *Lord Saxondale* at once accepted this kind proposal.

"If you like to get up behind me," said the new friend, with still increasing affability of manner, "a few minutes will bring us to our destination, and at this hour of the night it is by no means likely we shall encounter any one to notice the singularity of the proceeding. By the bye," he exclaimed, ere pausing for the young nobleman's answer to this last proposition, "I ought perhaps to inform you that I am Captain *Chandos*, of the British army—unattached at present."

"The circumstances under which we have met, and your kindness, Captain *Chandos*," returned *Edmund*, "lead me to express a hope that we shall be better acquainted. I am *Lord Saxondale*, and shall be most happy to return your civility by receiving you in *Park Lane*."

"I have heard of your lordship," said the Captain, "as of course everybody has—and am proud at thus enjoying the honour of your company. Now, my lord, catch hold of my arm—I have left the stirrup free for you—and spiring up behind me."

This was immediately done; and now behold *Lord Saxondale* mounted upon this beautiful high-spirited steed, behind its rider, round whose waist he

was of course compelled to throw his arm in order to sustain his balance. Captain Chandos just touched the flanks of the horse with his spurs; and the animal started off at an easy gallop. A little further on the steed suddenly shied somewhat at a mile-stone which stood out in white and ghastly contrast against the dark hedge: and this little incident, by disturbing Lord Soxondale's equilibrium for a moment, led him to cling all the more tightly to the Captain. But he was suddenly seized with a strange feeling of astonishment when his hand encountered a remarkable fullness about the breast of the Captain's surtout-coat—so that the impression naturally made all in a moment upon Edmund's mind, was that his companion must be a woman in disguise. So bewildered was he by this discovery that he knew not what to say or do; and as the steed was galloping along the road towards Edmonton, the young nobleman rapidly experienced the most unpleasant doubts and misgivings springing up within him. At length, when he had made up his mind to turn the matter off in a laugh and inquire "who the fair unknown was that thus in male apparel play'd the part of Captain Chandos in her Majesty's service," the gallant officer himself—for we had better continue to speak of the rider in the masculine gender—suddenly reined in his steed in the most lonely part of the road; and clutching Lord Soxondale by the arm which encircled the slender waist and had been pressing against the tell-tale bosom, he gave him such a sudden whirl and jerk that the astounded Edmund was swept clean off the horse and landed upon his feet in the middle of the road.

"Now, my lord," said the audacious Captain, suddenly producing a pistol from the holster of his saddle, "your purse—your watch—and those rings from your fingers!"

Lord Soxondale was very far from being the most valorous young man in existence: and the sight of the pistol gleaming in the argentine splendour which poured down from the heavens, at once filled him with dismay. He cast an anxious look rapidly up and down the road—but no succour was nigh, nor did a sound of approaching horse or vehicle meet his ears.

"Come—quick, quick!" exclaimed Captain Chandos, the accents of whose voice, though still somewhat muffled

by the thick shawl-kerchief, nevertheless sounded peremptory enough. "Keep me not waiting as you value your life!"

"But—but—you are joking, Captain—I mean fair unknown—whoever you are," stammered Soxondale, still with a faint hope that it might prove a frolicsome jest after all.

"If you keep me talking here another minute you will find it to be no joke, I can assure you," at once rejoined the bold amazon. "Now then my lord, quick!—your purse, and so forth!"

The wretched Soxondale, perceiving that the fair unkown was indeed terribly in earnest, drew forth his purse with trembling hands and craven demeanour: then he surrendered up his watch, with the gold chain—and lastly he took the rings from his fingers.

"You have handsome diamond studs in your shirt," said the amazon, "but I will leave you them. I do not wish to strip you altogether:"—and a merry kind of laugh sounded from behind the rustling shawl-kerchief. "Now, my lord," added the false Captain, "I need scarcely enjoin you to hold your tongue relative to the adventure you have just experienced: for your pride will prevent you from proclaiming to the whole world that you have been robbed by a woman."

With these words, the female highwayman put spurs to her steed, which started away at full gallop; and in a few moments the amazonian desperado disappeared in the distance.

Discomfited, abashed, and devoured with shame, young Lord Soxondale stood transfixed to the spot in most wretched bewilderment. The spiteful elements of his character being aroused, he gnashed his teeth with impotent rage—and then he actually shed tears of vexation and annoyance. There he was, at a considerable distance from London—penniless—at an advanced hour of the night, or rather an early one of the morning—and so exhausted with fatigue that he trembled at the idea of the long walk which seemed before him. The whole night's adventures had been but too well calculated to terrify, harass, weary, and humiliate him. First startled up from a very short sleep—compelled to dress in haste and go forth to look for a bed elsewhere—then taken at least another mile farther out of his way, to be plundered and put to shame by a

"Depends upon what?" inquired Saxondale.

"Terms—offers—settlements—and so forth," was the answer.

"Then, is your mistress mercenary?"

"Not exactly mercenary—but she loves money, just as a great many other ladies do, as a means of procuring pleasure, to live in good style, keep her carriage and servants, and so forth—all of which she could not do with her salary at the Opera."

"And yet she is handsomely paid according to report," remarked Edmund.

"Not so well as people think, perhaps," rejoined the *soubrette*. "But you asked me if there were any hope? It is for you to get acquainted with my mistress, and see what she says. You do not seem too bashful, my lord, in making known your wishes; and certainly she will not be too bashful in giving you an answer. Of course I shall say everything I can in your favour; and you know that a lady's-maid in these cases possesses great influence with her mistress."

"Undoubtedly. You are her lady's maid then? I thought so the very first moment I saw you. One can always tell a lady's-maid——"

"Yes—we have a certain air," remarked the young woman, tossing her head conceitedly. "But why, my lord, do you not come and call to-morrow? or else write a very tender and affectionate billet?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Saxondale; "is it possible that your mistress would either receive me as a visitor without any introduction, or take notice of any letter I might send her?"

"Well, considering that you are a lord," responded the *soubrette* slyly, and with a sort of mysterious confidence, "I think it very probable my mistress might dispense with the usual formalities. Indeed, if she were, to come home alone presently, I am not quite sure but that you might be pardoned for your boldness in introducing yourself to her at once."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Edmund, now so elated that he forgot all the previous misadventures of the night.

"It is so possible?" was the response, "that I should advise you to make the attempt. Or if you are too bashful, you can just walk a little way up the road and leave me to say a few words

to my mistress. Then, if I were to come down to the gate and ask you to walk in and take supper with her—for she always has supper when she comes home; and it is now ready served in the drawing-room——"

"If you are not trifling with me," exclaimed Edmund, "and if you could really manage what you have just proposed, it should not be merely twenty guineas that I would put into your hand to-morrow, but fifty."

"Well, my lord," answered the *soubrette*, "it all depends upon whether a certain person comes home presently with my mistress. And that, to tell you the truth, was what I alluded to just now when you told me I had something at the tip of my tongue that I did not like to speak out."

"But who is this certain person?" inquired Saxondale.

"Mr. Walter, at the Opera."

"What, one of the great authorities of the establishment?" ejaculated Saxondale. "Oh! I know him tolerably well. I have frequently spoken to him behind the scenes—a stout elderly gentleman——"

"The same," responded the *soubrette*. "He's a nice enough man in his way, but very particular indeed; and that was why I was fearful that if he did come home presently with my mistress, he would be angry on finding me talking to any one at the gate. Oh! he is so particular," repeated the abigail, "and treats my mistress just as if she were his wife—hands her in and out of her carriage with the greatest respect——"

"But what, then, has he to do with your mistress?" demanded Saxondale.

"Is he related to her?"

"Oh! my lord, how stupid you are! Can't you guess?"—then with another sly look, and once more in a mysterious tone of confidence, the *soubrette* added. "He is just as much related to her as your lordship wishes to be."

"Do you mean to tell me she is living under his protection!" demanded Edmund in astonishment.

The *soubrette* nodded her head affirmatively.

"Oh, the sly puss!" ejaculated Saxondale: "and rumour speaks so highly of her virtue! Well, after all, I was right," he observed, musing audibly, "in what I said to my friend Staunton, when I declared that I had no great opinion of the virtue of any female upon the stage. But still I did think that she was virtuous as yet—although

I fancied that her virtue was not an impregnable citadel. And you tell me," he continued, again addressing himself to the *soubrette*, "that your mistress is living under the protection of this Mr. Walter?"

"Yes. Is there anything astonishing in it?"

"Oh, nothing at all! But is she much attached to him?"

"No—far from it: and between you and me, my lord, the conquest will not prove altogether so difficult as you may fancy. But here she comes! Haste away for a few minutes!"

Lord Saxondale, whose ear had suddenly caught the sounds of an approaching vehicle at the same time as the lady's-maid's, at once acted in obedience to her suggestion, and hurried higher up the road. Then stopping and looking back he perceived a brougham drive up to the gate of the villa-garden. The lady's-maid immediately issued forth—the coachman leapt down—and one person only emerged from the carriage. That person was a female—and she at once entered the precincts of Evergreen Villa.

"Now then," thought Saxondale to himself, as he experienced a thrilling exultation of the heart, "it is about ten to one that within a very few minutes I shall have the happiness of being in the presence of Signora Vivaldi. That *soubrette* of hers is an artful hussey, and is pretty sure to manage the business cleverly. Ah! now the coachman takes the vehicle round to the stables. I wonder how long I shall have to wait here? Perhaps the maid is already opening the matter to her mistress. But if the world only knew what I have discovered to-night—that the beautiful Angela Vivaldi, whose virtue has been paraded off as immaculate as her loveliness is transcending, is nothing more nor less than the kept mistress of one of the great Dons of the Opera, what casting up of eyes, and holding up of hands, and lifting up of voices there would be! Well, after all, it will be a conquest of its kind—because I know she has refused so many offers and has treated so many letters with contemptuous silence. And yet, if she should all of a sudden receive me into favour it will be rather astonishing. But the *soubrette* spoke confidently enough! Ah! I know what it must be! This Signora has her pride and has refused two or three Marquises, four or five Earls, and a

whole score of Barons, just because they were not of ancient family; and I presume that cunning *soubrette*, knowing that I am descended from ancestors who lived in the time of the Tudors, is very well aware beforehand that her mistress will not say nay to me.

In these and similar musings did half-an-hour pass, while the conceited young nobleman was kicking his heels to and fro in the road. At length he became uneasy. Was it possible that the lady's maid had been laughing in her sleeve at him the whole time? He began to fear so. But if it were the case, would it not add the crowning ignominy to all the previous humiliations of this memorable night? Saxondale was rapidly falling into despondency. But ah! the front door of the villa opens—a female form trips forth and speeds down to the gate! With hope suddenly reviving—not merely reviving, but soaring up into exultation—Lord Saxondale hurries thither; and the first glance he obtains of the lady's-maid's countenance, is the harbinger of happiness.

"Well, what news have you for me?" he impatiently asked.

"Let this be the reply," responded the *soubrette*: and she opened the gate.

Edmund hastened in: the young woman shut the gate—and hurriedly conducted him into the hall. There, as she closed the front door, she threw upon him a look full of arch meaning, and whispered, "Did I not tell you that I should succeed? did I not promise a triumph?"

Lord Saxondale could scarcely retain his joy as he breathed the most liberal promises in the ears of the young woman.

"Walk in, my lord," she said throwing open a door leading out of the hall. "My mistress will be with you immediately. She is merely making some change in her toilet."

Saxondale entered an apartment that was not merely elegantly, but even luxuriously furnished. A table in the centre was spread with a supper consisting of several cold dainties and choice wines. The curtains had been drawn closely over the windows; and the room was lighted by a lustre suspended from the ceiling.

"Now," thought Lord Saxondale to himself, "In a few minutes—perhaps in a few seconds—I shall have an opportunity of gazing close upon those charms which I have already devoured

from a distance. But hers is a loveliness which cannot diminish by a near view. Ah! what happiness!"—and he literally rubbed his hands with delight.

At this moment he heard female voices whispering in the hall: then the door opened—and then a lady of tall stature, great beauty, and elastic walk, entered the room. She was clad in an elegant wrapper thrown loosely around her; and in her appearance there was not merely that negligent abandoament of one who has first put on a deshabillee, but also a meretricious exposure of her charms.

She was *not* the Signora Vivaldi—and therefore Lord Saxondale at once took her to be either a guest or a relation of a fair *danseuse*. He accordingly bowed with the politest courtesy, but volunteered no explanation of his object in obtaining this interview.

"Your lordship will doubtless think me very indiscreet and very imprudent," said the lady, motioning him to be seated, as she threw herself listlessly upon a sofa placed near the supper-table, "in receiving you at this time of night—or rather, I should say, at so early an hour in the morning: but from all that my maid told me of your lordship's anxiety to form my acquaintance, I was vain enough to suppose—"

"Your maid?" echoed Lord Saxondale, with unfeigned astonishment. "Surely there must be some mistake? It was the fair mistress of the villa to whom I was desirous of paying my respects."

"And I, my lord," answered the lady, reddening with mingled indignation and wounded pride, "am the mistress of the villa! If your lordship is disappointed, and expected to meet some other person, your lordship can retire. It was not I who sought this interview; and therefore the humiliation of the mistake will not rest with me."

"Do not be angry, I beseech you!" cried Saxondale, scarcely recovering from his bewilderment. "It is true that I had been led to imagine another lady lived here: but the one in whose presence I have the honour to find myself is so charming a substitute that it is as it were only finding myself in one part of Paradise when I had fancied that I was being led to another."

"Your lordship at all events has the art of turning a compliment most prettily," said the young lady, smiling so as to reveal a set of very beautiful

teeth. "But pray whom did you expect to meet here on the present occasion?"

"To tell you the truth, it was the Signora Vivaldi," answered Saxondale.

"Oh, the prude!" instantaneously cried the fair one, with an indignant toss of the head. "But I begin to understand how this mistake originated. It is doubtless because I also belong to the Opera—"

"Just so!" exclaimed Lord Saxondale. "And now tell me at whose feet I have the honour of kneeling?" he added, suiting the action to the word, and dropping down upon his knees before the lady whose hand he took and pressed to his lips.

"You may know me as Emily Archer, if you like," was the response, accompanied by a sweet seductive smile: "but at the Opera and to the world I am known as Mademoiselle D'Alembert."

"Oh! then, if I have lost one beautiful *danseuse*, I have obtained another!" exclaimed Edmund, as he again pressed her hand to his lips: then rising from his knees and seating himself by her side, he said, "How foolish in me not to have recognized you at once! I have often admired you—and between ourselves considered you a much finer *artiste* than the Signora Vivaldi—"

"Ah! my dear Lord Saxondale," exclaimed Miss Archer, "it is only jealousy, and bad taste, and envy, and want of discernment, and all kinds of nasty feelings, that have put me second instead of first. But come, let us take some supper—and a glass of champagne will enliven our discourse."

Lord Saxondale and the meretricious beauty of the Opera-ballet accordingly placed themselves at table; and by the time the young nobleman had imbibed his third glass of champagne he had not merely forgotten the beautiful Angela altogether, but found himself breathing the most extravagant proposals in the ears of the seductive Emily Archer.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GRAND ENTERTAINMENT.

TURN we now to the residence of Lady Macdonald in Cavendish Square.

It was six o'clock in the evening of the day that followed the night of Lord Saxondale's many adventures; and Lady Florina Staunton was seated in her own private apartment

adjoining her bedchamber. The room was splendidly furnished; and the ornaments were of a character which displayed the refined taste of its presiding divinity. Several exquisite alabaster statues were dispersed about—there were vases filled with flowers which exhaled a delicious perfume—and on a side table were scattered drawing-materials, with a few exquisite specimens of the art in water-colour.

Florina was dressed for a party. Her beautiful hair was arranged in ringlets, and ornamented with pearls and a single camelia that seemed typical of her own virgin purity. She was seated at a table, whereon lay a book and a letter, both of which she had been reading. The former was a volume of Scott's Poems, of which she was a great admirer: the letter was one that had been received by her aunt that same afternoon from Mr. Gunthorpe, and which had been given to our fair heroine to read.

But at the moment when we thus afford the reader a glimpse into that splendidly furnished apartment, Lady Florina was neither reading book nor letter, but was plunged into a deep reverie. Exquisitely beautiful did she seem as she sat, statue-like, in her rich dress and with her looks bent pensively downwards,—so exquisitely beautiful indeed, that it appeared a sin to allow the heart of so fair a creature to experience the slightest source of vexation or sorrow! And yet sorrow did lurk in that gentle bosom of hers: for the young lady could not blind herself to the circumstance that in being regarded as the future wife of Lord Saxondale, she was to be sacrificed to the wretched conventionalisms of high life, and that her hand was to be bestowed upon one whom she could not possibly love and who even inspired her with aversion and disgust. But there was another circumstance to which Florina could not close her convictions: and this was, that if she did not love Lord Saxondale she nevertheless loved another!

"Yes," she thought to herself in the depth of that reverie in which we find her plunged, "he is one of nature's true aristocracy and needs no factitious ornament of rank nor accidental advantage of fortune to render him truly estimable. I feel that I love him! I can no longer shut out this truth from my mind. But in thus admitting it unto myself, is it not the same as acknowledging my own unhappiness?"

"Alas, yes! for it is in vain that I love him—I never can be his. Oh! that he loves me in return I know—I am convinced! Yes, William Deveril loves me!"—and as she thus spoke his name even to herself, she suddenly started as if with the consciousness of some guilty thought or deed. "And now," she continued, in her silent reverie, "I am decked to go forth into the brilliant saloons of fashion—to smile with my lips while my heart is weeping—to look happy in my face while my soul is dark with sorrow!"

At this moment a door opened at the extremity of Lady Florina's apartment; and galvanized as it were from her deep absorbing reverie, she started and looked round, as if fearful lest the person now entering, whoever it were, might read in her features the thoughts that had been agitating in her mind.

"Ah, my dear aunt!" she exclaimed, rising from her chair: "is the carriage at the door?"

"Yes, Flo dear," responded Lady Macdonald—an elderly woman, superbly dressed, but the artifices of whose toilet could not conceal and scarcely even mitigate the ravages of time upon a beauty that in her younger days had been of no common order. "It is half-past six—Lady Saxondale, dines at seven—and you know that she is so particular, she is always punctual."

"I am ready, aunt," replied Florina. "But surely it will not take half-an-hour," she added, smiling, "to reach Park Lane?—and I know that you do not like to be there much before the time."

"True," observed Lady Macdonald: "we will wait five minutes. Have you read Mr. Gunthorpe's letter which I sent into you just now?"

"I have read it with some degree of astonishment," answered Florina. "The other night, when he first introduced himself to me and Harold at the Opera, he said that he should be delighted to pay you a visit; and I assured him that you would be well pleased to show him every attention. And now," added Florina taking up the letter from the table and glancing her eyes over it, "he says that his numerous occupations in the City and the attention which he has to devote to certain business-matters, have compelled him to decide upon resigning for the present the advantages he would otherwise have been delighted to reap from Uncle Eg�den's letters of introduc-

tion. He dined with Harold the other day," added Florina, speaking hesitatingly; "and I do hope that my brother treated him with civility."

"Mr. Gunthorpe appears to be a singular kind of person," remarked Lady Macdonald. "However, he can act as he pleases. By the bye, talking of Harold—is he to be at Saxondale House this evening?"

"I believe so," responded Florina; "but I have not seen him to-day."

"And Edmund—has he called?" asked Lady Macdonald.

"He has not been here since Saturday, when he came with Harold to take me to the Opera."

"What! and this is Tuesday evening?" exclaimed Lady Macdonald, in a tone of vexation. "Three whole days without coming to pay his respects to you!—that is rather too bad—And yet," she immediately added, "it is nothing in high life. The sphere in which we move is in many respects different from the other grades of society in its usages and customs."

"Then I wish that I had been born in another sphere," observed Florina, in the lowest and most melting accents of her fluid voice.

"Niece, I do not like remarks of this kind," exclaimed Lady Macdonald, in a tone of remonstrance.

"But my dear aunt," replied the gentle girl, "surely the satisfaction of expressing my fanciful wishes is left to me, even though all other power of free-will be denied."

"What means this language, niece?" demanded Lady Macdonald. "Ah, I understand! It is one of those covert reproaches which you sometimes throw out against me, for having studied your best possible interests by arranging with Lady Saxondale that her son was to become your accepted suitor. I hope that you will not prove ungrateful—"

"Ungrateful!—no, not to you, my dear aunt!" cried the young lady, approaching her elderly relative and looking affectionately up into her countenance. "To me you have supplied the place of a lost mother! and I know that all you do is done for the best. Still—"

"Hush, my dear child!" exclaimed Lady Macdonald, who really loved her niece: "I know what you would say. You would tell me the old story—that you cannot love Edmund: But in the sphere in which we move," continued

her ladyship, making use of a phrase which was a great favourite with her, "love has very little to do with marriages. If I had a fortune to leave you, my dear girl, it would be different: but as all I possess dies with me, it was absolutely necessary for me to think of settling you well in life—and with all his faults, Lord Saxondale is a very eligible match. Besides, those faults of his are only the invariable frolics of youth; and it is better that he should sow his wild oats when young, before he marries, so that after he does marry he may settle down into a steady and quiet husband. But while we are talking here the time is slipping away, and we must be off."

Lady Macdonald and her niece thereupon descended to the carriage that was waiting, and in which they were borne to Park Lane. On arriving at Saxondale House, they were conducted up-stairs to the magnificent drawing-room, where Lady Saxondale, with her two daughters, was waiting to receive her guests. Her ladyship was sumptuously appalled, and looked as if invested with a perfectly imperial dignity. Juliana, the elder daughter, likewise shone in the glory of that proud and haughty beauty which she inherited from her mother: while the delicate and interesting loveliness of Constance appeared to greater advantage by the contrast.

"Where is Edmund?" asked Lady Macdonald, when the usual greetings had been exchanged on all sides.

"I expect him every moment: I should hope that he will not fail to make his appearance," responded Lady Saxondale, a cloud lowering upon her grandly handsome countenance, as if she felt that it was too bad for her son not to be there already. "He knows that there is a dinner-party this evening—"

Her ladyship's sentence was interrupted by the opening of the door; and Lord Petersfield was announced. This was one of Edmund's guardians, and was therefore received with very great attention and extreme politeness by Lady Saxondale. He was an old man—stout, but not exactly corpulent—tall and stately—and dignified even to solemn pomposity both in his manner and speech. He was a diplomatist and had been ambassador to several of the principal European Courts; but for certain political reasons which it is not worth while to enter into here, he at

present held no office, although the party to which he belonged was at the time in power. The most common observer could not be five minutes in his company without discovering him to be a diplomatist, though previously uninformed of the fact: for Lord Petersfield never spoke a word that was not duly measured, and scarcely ventured to perform the most trivial action without appearing to reflect whether it were a wise one or not. Ever invested with that solemn and indeed awful air of gravity which he had contracted during a long career in diplomacy, Lord Petersfield constantly looked as if the weight of the whole world's affairs were upon his shoulders, and that the slightest unguarded word would plunge them into ruin. Sometimes, if he could not make up his mind what answer to give to even the most trivial question put to him, he would remain scrupulously silent. Thus, if anybody observed that "the weather was very fine," and Lord Petersfield on casting his eyes upwards beheld the least cloud upon the heavens, he would prudently shut himself up in a solemn silence rather than stand the chance of compromising his judgment by admitting that it was fine when it was just possible to rain. If his opinion were asked upon any passing event or current topic, he was very seldom able to bring his mind to give an immediate response: he was not aware—he had not thought upon it—or it was a subject that required the deepest consideration. If he were met in the street proceeding to his Club or to the House of Lords, and being asked whether he was going, he would not immediately reply—it was possible he might be on his way to the one place or the other—but he would not pledge himself to the fact—he would rather not compromise himself by the assurance that it was so—many things might happen in the interval. Indeed, Lord Petersfield had a holy abhorrence of all downright questions, and never could give a prompt of straightforward answer. He even once, when accosted at a party and asked if he were not Lord Petersfield, looked positively dismayed at such a pointed question, replying that he did not exactly know—he had not considered upon it—he would rather not compromise himself—he might be Lord Petersfield—it was possible—but still no man ought to be called upon to answer in a hurry a query of such

grave personal importance. Nay, it was even whispered that when his lordship (who married late in life), conducted his intended to the altar, and was asked "whether he would take that woman to be his wife," his countenance grew awfully grave and his looks profoundly solemn, while he assured the clergyman that he was not prepared to speak decidedly upon the point—he did not like to compromise himself—and had a very particular aversion to such pointed queries.

Such was Lord Petersfield, one of Lady Saxondale's guests on the occasion of which we are writing. Mr. Marlow, Edmund's other guardian (of the firm of Marlow and Malton), was also invited; and a very different person he was from his colleague in the trusteeship. For precisely as Lord Petersfield was slow, pompous, and heavy, was the solicitor quick in action, glib in speech, and volatile in motion. When the door was thrown open and his name was announced, he rushed in all in a flurry, just as if he were late for an important case coming on before the Judges at Westminster, and in the space of three minutes he would talk more than Lord Petersfield ever spoke in three years.

A quick succession of guests soon followed the arrival of Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow,—Lords and Ladies, Right Honourables and Honourables—in short, a brilliant company to the number of fifty: for this was a very grand dinner-party that Lady Saxondale was giving on the present occasion. Lord Harold was amongst the guests: but it was not till the very last minute, and just as Lady Saxondale was beginning to despair, that Edmund made his appearance.

ladyship upon very important business." "Did you not give her a proper answer?" asked Lady Saxondale, in a low tone, but with an angry look, as if she thought the page had not done his duty.

"I assured the woman," was the whisper'd response, "that your ladyship would see no one now; but she desired me to say that she must have an interview if only for a minute, without delay too, for she has got to be quite at the other end of London by nine o'clock. Please, my lady, these are the woman's own words."

Lady Saxondale seemed struck by an astonishment not unmixed with dismay at this intelligence, and for a moment she hesitated how to act—murmuring to herself, "Who can it possibly be?" Then suddenly making up her mind, she said, "Go and show the woman into the parlour down stairs, and I will come to her in a moment."

None of the guests overheard this rapid and brief colloquy between her ladyship and the page: nor was the emotion of the former, on receiving so insolent a message, observed by any one present in the drawing-room, save her elder daughter Juliana—and this young lady's attention was only drawn to the incident by the circumstance that from under her long eyelashes she was hending stealthy and sidelong glances towards the beautiful page the whole time that he was in the room. Thus was it that Juliana was led to observe that something had transpired to vex and alarm her mother; but though suddenly animated with a deep curiosity to learn what it was, she did not dare follow her parent from the room for the purpose.

Lady Saxondale, with a gracious apology to those guests who were seated near her for her being compelled to leave them for an instant, quitted the apartment, and proceeded down stairs to the room where the obtrusive visitress was waiting to see her. Her ladyship remained absent for about a quarter of an hour, during which interval Juliana was puzzling herself to conjecture what on earth it could be that had thus evidently troubled her mother. At the expiration of that time Lady Saxondale returned to the drawing-room; and still from beneath her long dark lashes did Juliana intently watch her mother's countenance. She at once saw that it was

pale and bore the traces of very recent agitation—an agitation, too, which was evidently still heaving within her ladyship's bosom, but all outward appearance of which she was endeavouring with a mighty effort to conceal. Returning to her seat, she at once entered with high-bred ease and graceful courtesy into the topic of the conversation that was going on around her; but in the tones of her mother's voice the keen and cunning Juliana perceived the evidences of that inward trouble which she had already observed reflected in her looks.

Dinner was announced; and the aristocratic throng proceeded to the banqueting-room, which presented a magnificent appearance to the eye. It was completely flooded with the dazzling light shed from two lustres each containing at least forty wax-candles: the table literally groaned beneath the massive services of plate; and twenty domestics in gorgeous livery were in attendance. The dinner passed off as all such banquets in high life usually do—that is to say, heavily—all real enthusiasm of feeling and true sense of enjoyment being weighed down and chilled by the petrifying influence of formality. Lord Petersfield was, if possible, more reserved, guarded, and cautious in all he said and did than ever; and his air of diplomacy hung about him with a truly awful effect. When asked which soup he would prefer, he gave the domestic such an overwhelming gaze that the unfortunate footman wished the floor would open and swallow him up: but when pointedly asked by Lady Saxondale which part of the turbot he preferred, he looked as if he thought there was a design to entrap him into some snare or take an advantage of him. In this way his lordship helped to render the ceremonials of the dinner-table more coldly ceremonious still, and the formalities more icily formal. As for Lady Saxondale, she did the honours of the table with the dignified grace and well-bred courtesy becoming her rank, and also her position as mistress of the house: but despite all her efforts to throw a veil over the thoughts that were agitating within her brain, there were nevertheless moments when the keen eye of Juliana could detect a sudden expression of anguish flitting over her

mother's proud countenance; and she likewise noticed the almost preterhuman effort which on those occasions her ladyship exerted to rise dominant as it were above the interval agony that was torturing her. More than ever, therefore, was Juliana's curiosity excited; and in the secret depths of her own mind did she resolve by some means or another to penetrate the mystery.

It was not till past nine o'clock that the ladies withdrew to the drawing room, and the gentlemen were left at table to drink a few more glasses of wine ere summoned to partake of coffee. Thank heaven! the disgusting and bestial system of sitting for hours over the wine after the ladies have retired, has of late years been rapidly falling into desuetude, English habits in this respect yielding to the civilizing influences of French examples. But still, at dinner-parties, the gentlemen persist in remaining a little while to enjoy a jovial glass until coffee be served up in the drawing-room; and so it was upon the present occasion. Mr. Marlow, glad to be relieved from the shackles of those formalities which had hitherto prevailed, began to rattle away with his wonted volubility, and quite alarmed Lord Petersfield by suddenly asking that noble man which his lordship preferred, generally speaking, the French or Rhenish wines? The cautious diplomatist gave Mr. Marlow an awful look, as if he shrewdly suspected the cunning lawyer meant to take some advantage of him by so pointed a question: then in grave and solemn tones he announced that it was a subject which, considering the rival interests that existed in respect to wines between France and Germany, he could not possibly be expected to give an opinion upon, until he had examined all the most recent parliamentary documents bearing on the point. Indeed, his lordship more than hinted that the very stability of existing treaties might be jeopardized by hazarding too rash an opinion on such a grave and important subject.

Lord Sixondale and Lord Harold Staunton, who had hitherto been separated during the dinner, now took advantage of the comparative freedom which the withdrawal of the ladies permitted; and getting together they began to chat in a low tone upon affairs interesting only to themselves.

"Well, how have you got on with the beauteous Angela?" asked Lord Harold.

"Not at all," was the response. "But such an adventure! I cannot tell it you all now. Your valet Alfred, despite his cleverness, was quite wrong—"

"What do you mean? Did he not put you on the true scent?"

"At this very moment," returned Sixondale, "I am as ignorant as ever I was of the abode of Signora Vivaldi."

"Then she does not live at the place to which Alfred followed her?" observed Lord Harold, with unfeigned surprise.

"It was not she whom Alfred followed at all. But mind it was not poor Alfred's fault; and so I do not blame him. The lady whom he did follow, is just of the same height as Angela—and when wrapped up in a cloak and veiled, might in the hurry of the moment be easily taken for the Signora."

"Then who in heaven's name was she?" asked Staunton, scarcely knowing whether to believe his young friend's story or not.

"You know—at least by sight—Mademoiselle d' Alembert?"

"What, Emily Archer? of course I do—and so do a dozen others."

"Isn't she a splendid creature?" asked Sixondale, his ear not having caught Staunton's last words nor his eyes having noticed the somewhat sarcastic smile which appeared on his friend's lip. "Having been disappointed in my hope of meeting Angela, it was an immense consolation to fall in with Emily Archer as a substitute. Well, to be brief, she and I have made certain arrangements together; and this morning, after breakfast, she wrote the prettiest, sweetest, and gentlest little billet in the world, telling her friend Mr. Walter that she thanked him for all past kindness, but was compelled by circumstances to give him his dismissal."

"Then you have taken her under your protection?" asked Staunton: and as Sixondale nodded an affirmative, he immediately added, "Of course you have abandoned your love-campaign in respect to Signora Vivaldi?"

"Oh, certainly! Miss Archer stipulated that as one of the conditions—"

"And therefore you will not consider it treacherous or unfair on my part if I take up the pursuit which you have thus renounced?" continued Staunton.

"By all means do so," rejoined Edmund. "I am so well pleased with

Miss Emily that it is with no great pang I abandon my hopes of the Signora. And now I wish you good luck in the affair you are taking in hand."

There was a passing smile upon Lord Harold's countenance, which seemed to imply that he thought Edmund a very great fool for his pains: but as at this moment Lord Petersfield addressed some particular question to Saxondale, the latter did not notice Staunton's look.

Soon afterwards the gentlemen proceeded to the drawing-room where coffee was served round; and then the whole magnificent suite of state apartments was thrown open for the dance. Carriages kept rolling up to the doors of Saxondale House, depositing their aristocratic burdens, and then rushing away again to make room for fresh arrivals: so that by ten o'clock the brilliantly-lighted rooms were thronged with an almost countless company; and a splendid band being in attendance, the alternate quadrille and waltz soon sounded most inspiritingly throughout the mansion.

Lady Saxondale performed the part of a hostess with that dignified but quiet air which belongs to high breeding; and truly magnificent did she appear with her grand beauty set off by all the advantages of a superb toilet. The white ostrich plumes waved gracefully above the head which she carried with a statuesque elegance slightly commingled with hauteur; and no one who now gazed upon that proudly handsome countenance would have for a moment fancied that its serene dignity was but a mask veiling the inward troubles of the soul. In a suite of apartments thronged with splendid specimens of the female sex, Lady Saxondale was assuredly the most superb. There were others more sweetly and interestingly beautiful—such, for example, as the captivating Lady Florina Staunton, or even Lady Saxondale's younger daughter Constance: but there was not one who in Junc-like majesty of form and splendid pride of glorious womanhood, could be pointed out as a rival to Lady Saxondale. Behold her as she now stands, for a few moments a little way apart from the brilliant throng, with one fair hand lightly resting upon the marble-slab of a side-table, surveying the crowds of elegantly dressed men, stately dames, and lovely girls whom she has assembled there; and even the

veriest anchorite would be compelled to confess that it were a pity to retire from a world embellished by so superb and magnificent a beauty.

It was during an interval between the dances that Juliana, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter, slipped unperceived from the ball-room; and going forth upon the landing, cast a rapid and scrutinizing glance around. Two pages were standing a little way down the staircase, conversing with each other. One of them was Francis Paton, that beautiful youth of eighteen whom we have already described. Juliana called the other page to her, and sent him away on some trifling errand which suggested itself at the moment, and which indeed was a mere pretext to enable her to snatch an opportunity of saying a word to his good-looking companion. The moment, he had disappeared down the stairs, Juliana beckoned Frank to approach; and the colour mantled in vivid scarlet upon the youth's countenance as he hastened to obey that summons.

"Frank," said Juliana, her own countenance likewise blushing as she bent upon him the flashing light of her superb dark eye, "tell me, what was that message you delivered to her ladyship before dinner? I noticed that she seemed annoyed and uneasy: and it has troubled me much."

Juliana might have said, if she had told the truth, that the only trouble she had experienced in the matter was that of the most lively curiosity,—a curiosity, indeed, so intense that she had not been able to restrain herself until the morrow ere she sought to gratify it.

"It was a woman, Miss, who called," replied Frank, almost overcome with bashfulness; "and she would insist upon seeing her ladyship."

"A woman to be thus impertinent!" exclaimed Juliana, her curiosity still more piqued, "What did she want?"

"I do not know, Miss," returned the page, raising his large liquid hazel eyes for a moment to the mantling countenance of the patrician young lady, and then casting down his looks again in greater confusion than before.

"But what sort of a woman was she?" asked Juliana, in a soft tremulous voice that quivered with the same emotions which made her heart throb; for she felt consumed with a devouring

passion as she fixed her regards upon the beautiful youth before her.

"She was a very common woman, Miss,—wretchedly dressed—with a cloak and cap. She had no bonnet on—Altogether, I did not like her looks. But I suppose she was some poor woman asking charity or a favour, and not knowing very well how to behave herself."

At this moment the sounds of footsteps ascending the stairs were heard; and Juliana, flinging upon the page a look as expressive of a fervid passion as looks could possibly be, turned hurriedly away and passed into an ante-chamber, where she paused for a few minutes to compose herself—for she felt the blush of her fevered sensations still upon her cheeks. Then, with the image of the beautiful page still uppermost in her mind—but also still continuing to wonder what the meaning of that mysterious visit to Lady Saxondale could possibly be—she returned into the state-apartments, where her hand was immediately solicited for the ensuing dance.

We have already said that Mr. Marlow, one of Lord Saxondale's guardians, was a guest, at the banquet. His partner Mr. Malton had also been invited, but through pressing business, the gentleman had been unable to reach Saxondale House until the saloons were thrown open for the ball. Though somewhat resembling his partner in personal exterior, he was not of the same bustling and volatile character, but far more precise, cool, and sedately business-like. Shortly after he made his appearance, Mr. Marlow drew him aside; and they conversed together for a few minutes upon some private matters of their own.

"I shall be unable to come to the office to-morrow," said Mr. Marlow "as I have got something particular to do at home. And yet you and I, Malton, must manage to have an hour's conversation in the morning relative to that lawsuit:"—alluding to the business of which they had been conversing, and which was of great importance to their clients though of none to the reader.

"Shall I run down to you very early?" asked Mr. Malton.

"Why can't you come home with me to night?" suggested the bustling Marlow, taking off his kid glove and displaying a splendid diamond ring as he ran his fingers through his hair.

"Sleep at my house, and then we can talk over the whole thing at breakfast-time to-morrow. You are a bachelor," he added, laughing, "and have no account to give of your conduct to anybody."

"Well, be it so," responded the junior partner after a few moments' consideration. "When my carriage comes, I will order it to be dismissed."

"And you will take a seat with me in mine," was Mr. Marlow's prompt rejoinder. "We shall leave at midnight: for I can't stand late hours:"—and he played somewhat conceitedly with his superb gold guard-chain.

"Nor I either," responded Mr. Malton.

This little arrangement being entered into, the two lawyers separated, and proceeded to different parts of the room to mingle amongst the gay and brilliant groups of Lady Saxondale's guests. But we need not extend this chapter nor dwell at any greater length upon the details of the splendid entertainment; but will at once proceed to turn the reader's attention to a place and a scene contrasting marvellously with the sumptuous mansion and the glittering throng whereof we are now taking our leave.

CHAPTER XVI.

LADY BESS.

TRUE to her appointment with Chiffin the Cannibal, Madge Somers crossed the threshold of Solomon Patch's boozing-ken in Agar Town, just as the clock in the tap-room was striking nine, on the same evening on which Lady Saxondale's entertainment took place.

The Cannibal was drinking with a party of his friends when Madge made her appearance in the tap-room; but laying down his pipe and tossing off the remnants of his liquor, the Cannibal at once rose from his seat and followed her into the room above. This room was specially devoted to the private conferences of the persons frequenting Solomon Patch's house. It was here that many a dark and desperate deed was planned,—here that the perpetrators thereof were wont to assemble afterwards and divide the fruits of their iniquity,—here also that Mr. Patch himself transacted business with his friends when stolen property

was to be disposed of. It was a wretched place, Solomon Patch's love of money and niggard disposition preventing him from laying out the few shillings that might have rendered it somewhat decent. But then, on the other hand, it answered the purpose very well: no one grumbled at its rude furniture—its dirty floor and blackened walls; nor were the persons who were accustomed to use the room, of that delicate constitution likely to suffer by the draughts from the broken windows or the places where the absent panes were indifferently stopped up with old rags thrust through. A rude sort of staircase led up to an attic above; and this attic was provided with a bed for the accommodation of any one of Mr. Patch's friends whom circumstances might compel to seek a temporary retirement until some menacing storm was blown over.

It was into the conference-room above described that Madge Somers and Chiffin the Cannibal ascended, the former having obtained a candle from the old landlady.

"Well," said Chiffin as he took a seat upon a rude stool, "I suppose you have brought me my blunt according to promise? I have been thinking a good deal over that adventure of last night—"

"Then I beg you will not think any more of it," interrupted Madge peremptorily. "An agreement is an agreement: the business of last night has ceased to be your affair altogether, and is now mine; so I will thank you not to interfere in my concerns, if you wish us to continue good friends."

The Cannibal was about to give some surly reply, when Madge, thrusting her hand into her pocket, drew forth a quantity of sovereigns which she placed upon the table. The sight of the gold at once made the horrible countenance of the ruffian clear up—that is to say, it cleared up as much as the murky gloom of a thunder-cloud can be said to brighten when the sun shines forth from another part of the heaven upon it.

"Here are your hundred pounds," said Madge: "and now be contented."

"Well, the look of this precious metal, as romance-writers call it," said Chiffin, is enough to soften a fellow's heart;—and while he thus spoke he began to finger the gold pieces counting them over first of all to see that they were right, and then weighing them in his hand. "You have kept

your promise, Madge," he continued as he secured the money about his person; "and I have nothing more to say—unless it is to offer to stand a bowl of punch down stairs if you will come and partake of it."

But ere the woman had time to give the negative answer which she was about to return, the door opened, and Lady Bess sauntered with graceful ease into the room. She was apparelled exactly in the same manner as when we previously described her—her fine person being admirably set off by the close-fitting frock coat, the well-made pantaloons, and all the other accessories of her masculine garb. For a moment her magnificent large eyes, with so bright a lustre shining in their black depths, were flung scrutinizingly upon Madge Somers and the Cannibal, as if to penetrate their proceedings at a single glance; and then with that off-hand air of easy negligence and graceful listlessness which generally characterized her, the female highwayman took a seat at the table.

"I hope I am not intruding," she said, "that old scoundrel Solomon told me you were up here closeted together; and as I have got a little business to transact with him I thought there would be no harm in joining you."

"Ah! I suppose it doesn't suit your gentility," growled Chiffin, "to stand lurking about down at the bar, or to go and sit amongst my pals in the tap-room."

"Is it not strange, Chiffin," cried Lady Bess, laughing good-naturedly, and thus displaying the two splendid rows of teeth that graced her rich mouth, "that you always have something complimentary to say to me? And yet I invariably treat you with as much civility as possible."

"Perhaps, you think, more than I deserve," remarked Chiffin, somewhat softened by Lady Bess's open-hearted frankness.

"Under circumstances it certainly is," she responded; "for you scarcely ever say a civil word to me."

"I don't know how it is, but I can't say that I dislike you," resumed Chiffin; "and yet I don't altogether feel myself at home in your presence. You are too fine and grand for me. Besides, you and I never act together."

"Our avocations are so different," exclaimed Lady Bess, with another merry laugh. But what if I were going

to propose something of a grand and startling nature, in which you can assist? Now, Madge, you see the Cannibal's eyes glisten; and he is actually excited with the hint I have thrown out."

"It's because in his heart he feels honoured by this confidence you are going to show him," observed Madge, who keenly and skilfully read the real feeling which had inspired the Cannibal at the moment.

"Honour be hanged!" said Chiffin snarly: then immediately adopting a more conciliatory tone, he hastened to observe, "But come, Lady Bess, if there's anything you can really put in my way, I shan't refuse to accept it; and it might make us better friends."

"Very good: I will explain myself presently," replied the female highwayman: for at this moment old Solomon Patch entered the room.

He was an ill-looking man—shabbily dressed, of sordid appearance, and with a sneaking slyness in the expression of his countenance. The love of gain was as clearly traced in every line of those angular features and that wrinkled face as if his character had been written thereon; and it required no great depth of observation to perceive that there was scarcely any villainy from which Solomon Patch would shrink so long as he beheld the certainty of a commensurate reward.

"Am I intruding?" he asked, as he slowly and hesitatingly entered this room—this deferential question not being addressed to either Chiffin or Madge, but to the amazonian beauty.

"Intruding—no!" she exclaimed. "All I want you to do is to take those trinkets which I picked up on the road last night, and give me what according to your ideas you think they are worth." Thus speaking, Lady Bess, with an indifferent and careless air took from her pocket a watch and chain and three or four finger-rings. "I might have added some beautiful diamond studs to this little parcel of jewellery if I had chosen," she observed with a smile upon the fulness of her rips and luscious lips; "but I let the poor frightened fellow keep them."

While she was thus speaking, the watch and rings which she had laid upon the table had suddenly become the objects of an earnest and intense gaze on the part of Madge Somers, who at once recognized them as having belonged to her guest of the preceding night—young Lord Saxon.

dale. Chiffin the Cannibal was also contemplating the trinkets—not because he knew them, for he did not—but because it was in the man's nature to feel an interest in anything that was the produce of plunder or other illicit proceedings. Lady Bess was herself looking carelessly at the same objects at the moment; and therefore she did not perceive the attention with which Madge Somers was fixing her eyes on them.

Solomon Patch took them off the table, and bent down towards the light in order to examine them as closely as possible with a view to ascertain their value: then after a long and careful scrutiny, he said, in a stammering, hesitating manner, "Well I don't know—I always like to deal with your ladyship—you are so good and generous: but I really couldn't say more than thirty pounds—and that would be quite a stretch, to oblige you."

"Oh! never mind," said Lady Bess carelessly: "I do not intend to take less than fifty—and as I am in no particular want of money at this moment, I will keep the trinkets till I am. Or perhaps I may take a gallop down to Gravesend one of these fine mornings and see what your brother Israel will offer."

"Stop, stop, my lady!" exclaimed old Solomon, evidently not wishing to let a good bargain slip out of his hands. "I—I—don't mind saying forty—and that's the very outside."

"Give me over the things, you old scoundrel," said Lady Bess, more good-naturedly than angrily. "I am resolved not to part with them under the fifty."

Solomon Patch continued turning the watch and chain over and over in his hand: then he examined the rings one after the other: then he recurred to the watch—opening it, examining the works, and in short scrutinizing it most minutely in every point. At length, after several fruitless attempts to beat down Lady Bess in her price, he gave her the fifty pounds she demanded and walked off with the spoil.

"Now," said Chiffin, as soon as Solomon Patch had quitted the room, "what about this little business that you have been talking of? Something that you and I can do together, you know, and which is to make us better friends than we have yet been?"

"Oh! you must not think," exclaimed Lady Bess, somewhat haughtily, "that I want to curry favour with you,

Chiffin. But if I should be able to let you into a good thing," she added with her wonted frankness of honour, "perhaps you will in future adopt a more civil tone towards me?"

"Well, I don't know but what I should give you my vote if the whole lot of us that frequent Sol Patch's were to elect a captain. So you see I hav'n't really any particular dislike to you, Lady Bess:"—and as Chiffin thus spoke he endeavoured to look as pleasant as possible.

"There!" said Madge, addressing herself to the female highwayman: "I am sure after *that* you won't refuse to throw a good thing in Chissin's way."

"Not I!" exclaimed Lady Bess. "And now then to the point. Somewhere near Edmonton there lives a lawyer named Marlow. He is very rich—thinks a great deal of himself—and bedecks his person with very valuable jewellery. He has got a diamond ring on his finger that was presented to him by some lady to whose son he is guardian; and this ring is said to be worth two hundred guineas at least. Then his watch is set round with brilliants—he has a splendid diamond pin in his shirt-frill—and in his pocket-book he always carries a good round sum in bank-notes. Now, all these particulars I have ascertained direct from his coachman: no matter how. Well, this Mr. Marlow has gone to a party to-night; and I have positive information that he has got all his splendid jewellery about him—because it is to a first-rate house at the West End that he has gone—indeed to the very lady's to whose son he is guardian. In a word, between twelve and one o'clock this night it is my intention to ease him of those splendid jewels as well as his purse and pocket-book, on the road to Edmonton."

"And you want me to help you, I suppose?" asked the Cannibal, with a grim smile of satisfaction at the prospect thus held forth.

"Precisely so," returned Lady Bess. "But all the assistance you need render will be merely a pretence, just for the sake of keeping up appearances."

"Ah, I see!" observed Chiffin. "I must make believe to keep the coachman in awe while you do the rifling business with his master—isn't that it?"

"You have read my purpose exactly," responded Lady Bess. "And now, do you agree? The booty shall be dis-

posed of to old Solomon, and of course we will divide the produce equally that is to say, leaving a third share to the coachman."

"I like the business, and the business likes me," responded Chiffin. "But is a safe place to do a thing of this sort mean along the road there, down to Tottenham or Edmonton?"

"Safe!" echoed Lady Bess, her lips wreathing in scornful contempt. Danger: then as a sudden recollect struck her, she laughingly exclaimed, "Why, those things that I had just sold to old Patch were picked on that very same road last night. I hal hal it was one of the finest adventures you ever heard of in the whole course of your life. I was galloping out of London along the Seven Sisters Road, when I met a young fellow never mind his name, although I told it to me—who was wandering about in a benighted state. So I offered him a bed at my house—"

"Where do you live, then?" as Chiffin, who with his arm resting on the table and his head bent forward, was listening attentively to the amazon's talk.

"Never mind where I live," she responded with an arch smile. "Suffice it for you to know that I pretended the zones to live in that neighbourhood, and invited the young man home. He accepted the invitation and got up behind me on my horse. I could perceive that when he held round the waist he discovered that he was not exactly of the sex I at first seemed: for I felt him trembling like an aspen leaf. How I laughed in sleeve! But our ride did not continue very far: for in a few minutes we reached a convenient part of the road where it is quite lonely, and there I threw my gentleman off and made him surrender up those trinkets which I have just handed over to Solomon."

At this moment Lady Bess, who had been talking in a careless off-hand manner, without addressing her particularly either to the Cannibal or Madge, suddenly raised her eyes and was perfectly struck by the singular look which that woman was fixing upon her. Lady Bess could not possibly penetrate the meaning of the look: it was so strange—so sinister, so unfathomable.

"Ah! then it was a good night's work for you?" exclaimed Madge instantaneously resuming her won-

aspect, and endeavouring to appear as if she had not been excited by any extraordinary emotion.

"Yes—a tolerably good night's work," answered the female highwayman, not choosing to question the woman—at least on that occasion—as to the cause of the strangeness of her manner a moment back. "Besides this gold," she went on to say, leisurely gathering up the money she had received from patch, and which she had until now left lying upon the table with a careless indifference concerning it, "I got a well-filled purse from my deluded companion of that double ride on horseback. Poor fellow! he was frightened out of his wits; and I am very sure that he will not go and confess to his mamma," she added, laughing ironically, "that he was robbed by a woman. But now I shall take my departure. Chissin, you will meet me at the bridge over the canal half-an-hour after midnight. You know where I mean—in the road leading to Tottenham."

"I know," responded Chissin; "and I shall be there before my time. It won't take much more than an hour's walk: so if I leave here at a quarter past eleven it will be all right."

Lady Bess now quitted the wretched-looking room; and descending the stairs, issued from the public-house: then mounting her horse, she rode away.

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAWYERS.

It was a rather dark night—for there was no moon, and the clouds that were flitting over the face of heaven, borne on the wings of a somewhat strong breeze, obscured the beams of the twinkling stars. The lamps of Mr. Marlow's carriage were however lighted; and rapidly was the vehicle proceeding along the Tottenham Road, driven by the treacherous coachman through whose agency the contemplated robbery had been suggested. The carriage was of that kind which in a former instance we have already described as a *brougham*: it therefore had no footman either standing or seated behind, the coachman being the only servant attached to it.

Inside, Mr. Marlow and Mr. Malton were lounging comfortably back, conversing upon the gaieties which they had so recently quitted at Saxondale House, and intermingling their discourse with a few business-remarks relative to the various matters which their extensive office had to conduct. For the firm of Marlow and Malton was one of the eminent as well as the wealthiest in London,—all their business being chiefly with clients belonging to the highest orders of society.

The equipage had just crossed the canal bridge, and was proceeding at a slower pace down the somewhat steep slope which the road takes in the direction of Tottenham, when the two lawyers were suddenly startled by the quick trampling of a horse galloping up to the side of the carriage, and a peremptory command to the coachman to stop. At the same instant they saw a fellow with a huge club bound from the side of the road and spring up on the box; where, seizing upon the coachman, he warned him with terrible threats not to offer the slightest resistance. The coachman did not mean to do anything of the sort, he being well prepared beforehand for this facetious portion of the drama.

Mr. Malton, who was on the side nearest to the mounted highwayman, instantaneously let down the window, and with a quick glance surveyed the daring individual whose person was plainly visible by the light of the carriage-lamps. Nevertheless, the keen eyes of Mr. Malton did not detect the real sex of the highwayman; nor could he even catch the slightest glimpse of Lady Bess's countenance, inasmuch as she had put on a black mask just before stopping the carriage. But Mr. Malton did perceive that the mounted bandit was of somewhat slender make, and at all events afforded no outward indications of any extraordinary degree of physical strength. Such was the idea that immediately struck him as the result of the first few moments' survey: and he had little leisure to regard her any longer—for he was almost instantaneously called upon to some prompt and decisive course of action by the demand which Lady Bess at once made for the surrender up of purses and jewels.

She had not expected to find two gentlemen seated inside the vehicle; and on discovering that there were two she immediately apprehended re-

sistance. Therefore, drawing forth a pocket-pistol, she presented it at the window, saying in the roughest tone to which she could possibly disguise her voice, "Quick, quick, gentlemen! Your purses, your watches, and so forth!"

"No—by heaven! not without a struggle for it!" exclaimed Mr. Malton, who was a man of undaunted courage; and as he spoke he dashed upon the door and sprang forth from the vehicle with a gold-headed cane in his hand.

The abrupt opening of the door made Lady Bess's horse suddenly shy and veer round; and she being at the instant unprepared for such a movement, was thrown heavily. Mr. Malton, with admirable presence of mind, clutched the horse's bridle with one hand, while with the other he snatched up the pistol which Lady Bess had let drop and which had happened not to explode. Mr. Marlow, the elder partner, encouraged by the resolute bravery of his friend, likewise sprang forth; and perceiving at a glance that the highwayman who lay upon the ground was either stunned or killed by the fall, he seized upon the legs of Chiffin the Cannibal who had mounted to the box.

"This scoundrel is killed!" ejaculated Mr. Malton, alluding to Lady Bess, who lay quite motionless.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Chiffin: and violently disengaging himself from the hold which Mr. Marlow has fastened upon him, he sprang down from the box and rushed away as fast as his legs would carry him.

Mr. Marlow was thrown to the ground by the sudden violence of the Cannibal: but instantly rising to his feet, he shook himself, not merely for the purpose of casting off the dust which his garments had gathered by rolling in it, but likewise to assure himself that he had no broken bones. While however he was still somewhat uncertain on the latter point, his thoughts were quickly startled into another channel by an ejaculation which burst from the lips of his partner.

"Why, by heaven, it is a woman!" exclaimed Mr. Malton, who had just stooped down to ascertain whether the highwayman was actually killed or only stunned by the severe fall experienced from the horse.

"A woman!" echoed Mr. Marlow, likewise stooping down. "Aye, and a

very handsome one into the bargain!" —for his partner had plucked the black mask from her countenance. "But, dear me! I am very much mistaken if I don't know this face—yes, and that horse too—why, to be sure, I cannot be deceived! I have seen this woman—a lady I always thought her—riding about Tottenham and Edmonton on that very horse—but not in this attire though—in a proper female riding-habit. John, haven't you seen this lady?"

"Never mind asking any questions now," said Mr. Malton somewhat impatiently. "She, she lives—she opens her eyes!"

And it was so. Lady Bess had been merely stunned by the fall; and consciousness rapidly returning, she became aware of the position in which she was placed—a prisoner in the hands of the two attorneys.

"Are you hurt, young woman?" demanded Mr. Malton with a sternness that was only tempered by a feeling of humanity.

"No—I think not," answered Lady Bess, rising to her feet; then, while she was rapidly calculating the chances of escape, Mr. Malton seized her by the coat-collar while Mr. Marlow clutched her by the arm.

"This is a deed on your part which we cannot overlook," said the former.

"Certainly not," promptly added the latter. "As lawyers we must obey the law; and the law forbids us to let a felon escape."

"I can scarcely expect my forbearance at your hands under the circumstances," responded Lady Bess; "and I am not going to ask it. Do with me as you will:"—and she not only spoke in a firm tone, but likewise displayed a resolute dauntlessness of manner which quite astonished the two lawyers.

"What on earth are we to do with her?" asked Mr. Marlow.

"Take her on to Edmonton and give her to the police," was Mr. Malton's reply.

"You are known, young woman—you are known," said Marlow, as talkative as he was hustling, and now labouring under the greatest excitement. "I have seen you galloping about on this splendid dark chestnut of yours—but in a costume more befitting your sex. Why, 'pon my soul! I took you for a lady. I say, John, I have often noticed her to you—and I re-

member you mentioned her name once. What was it?"

"Sir," immediately interposed Lady Bess, who was chivalrously resolved to screen the treacherous servant, and thus save him from the perplexity of having to answer questions by the replies to which he might fear to compromise her, and thus in his hesitation draw suspicion on himself; "I will at once candidly and frankly inform you that I live near Tottenham—close at hand indeed—and that I pass by the name of Mrs. Chandos."

"Chandos, to be sure!" ejaculated the volatile Marlow: "that is it!"

"And now," Lady Bess immediately went on to observe, "although I seek no forbearance at your hands, I will request this little favour—that you permit me to call at my abode ere you consign me to the custody of the authorities, so that I may acquaint my servant with the position in which I am placed."

"Well, I see no harm in that," exclaimed Mr. Marlow. "Eh, Malton—what do you say?"

"I do not wish to behave harshly or cruelly to the unhappy young woman," was the latter gentleman's more measured response.

"My house is yonder—the white cottage which you see amongst the trees in that lane to the left:"—and Lady Bess extended her arm in the direction which she indicated.

"Well then, how shall we manage?" exclaimed Marlow. "Oh, I know! We will fasten the horse by the bridle to the carriage, and take our prisoner inside with us. Here, you hold her tight, Malton, while I dispose of the horse. 'Pon my soul, it is a splendid animal! I have often admired it—but little thought it was ridden by a highwayman—or rather a highway-woman."

While thus chattering, Mr. Marlow attached the horse's bridle to the back of the carriage; and that being done Lady Bess was desired to enter the vehicle. This she at once did without the slightest indication of any failure of courage. Then the two lawyers being likewise ensconced within the vehicle, the equipage drove away.

In a few minutes it reached the bottom of the slope; and passing out of the mainroad, entered the lane in which Lady Bess's residence was situated. This was soon gained; and the carriage, with the dark chesnut trotting behind it, stopped in front of

a neat cottage almost embowered in trees and having a very picturesque appearance.

"Who the deuce would have thought," exclaimed Mr. Marlow, as he hustled out of the vehicle, "that this beautiful place was occupied by so lawless a character? 'Pon my soul, it appears like a dream? Young woman, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—such a good-looking person as you are—"

"Come, come, Marlow, don't let us reproach her," interrupted Mr. Malton, as he held tight hold of Lady Bess's arm while she descended from the vehicle. "She will be punished enough, I dare say."

"Will you let me take my horse to the stable?" she inquired: "for I have no groom on the premises. A man who lives at yon hut"—and she pointed to a little cottage at a short distance—"is in the habit of coming to attend upon it."

"Oh! yes—we are not warring against the horse," ejaculated Mr. Marlow. "Here—I will soon help you—where is the stable?—round at the back?"

At this moment the front door was opened; and a woman of about thirty, and exceedingly respectable in appearance, came out. By the light which streamed forth from the passage of the house and which blended with that of the carriage-lamps, this woman exchanged a rapid glance with Mr. Marlow's coachman: but although Lady Bess perceived and understood it, neither of the two lawyers did.

"Rosa," said Lady Bess, "do not be frightened I am in some little trouble, and shall have to go away with these gentlemen. I have had a sad fall from my horse too, and have wounded my right leg. I feel that it is bleeding—and indeed the blood has run down into my boot. But never mind."

"Oh, my dear, dear mistress!" exclaimed Rosa, rushing forward and clasping her hands as if in despair: then stooping down, she felt the amazon's pantaloons, exclaiming, "Gorgeous! you are indeed bleeding!"

"In that case," said Mr. Malton, "we must allow you time to let your servant examine your injury and dress it. I have already said that we do not wish to use unnecessary harshness."

"I thank you, sir, for your courtesy—or I should say your generosity:—

and Lady Bess appeared to speak with a sincere feeling.

The horse was now speedily led round to the stable, where the saddle and bridle were taken off by Mr. Marlow's own hands: and then the two lawyers, Lady Bess, and the servant entered the house. An elegantly-furnished parLOUR received them; and Messrs. Marlow and Malton could not help exchanging a look of astonishment at the evidences of a refined taste, which the room presented to their view. Several good pictures, three or four beautiful little alabaster groups of statues, vases of flowers, and musical instruments, ornamented the place. Rosa hastened to light her wax-candles on the mantel; and then Lady Bess said, "You will permit me, gentleman, to ascend with my servant to my chamber for a few minutes?"

"Ah! but what guarantee have we against your escape?" at once cried Mr. Marlow.

"I know not," returned the female highwayman, with an appearance of the utmost frankness: "unless you station yourselves on the landing outside."

"Well, this we must do then, I suppose," exclaimed Mr. Marlow.

"Yes—there is no alternative," added Mr. Malton, who, though really regretting to be compelled to proceed to extremities against this extraordinary woman, was nevertheless one of those scrupulous and punctilious individuals who imagine that severity in such cases is a duty which they owe to society.

"Lead the way, Rosa," said Lady Bess; "and I will follow with these gentlemen."

The servant accordingly issued from the room, holding in her hand the chamber-candle with which she had previously lighted the tapers on the mantel; and the two lawyers, keeping Lady Bess between them proceeded up a handsomely carpeted staircase to the landing above.

"This is my room," said the amazon pointing to the door which Rosa had just opened; "and you will perhaps convince yourselves that it has no other outlet."

"Yes—that I will do," said the volatile Mr. Marlow: and he hastened into the chamber while Lady Bess remained outside on the landing with Mr. Malton.

"It's all right," exclaimed the senior partner as he came forth again:

"there's no possible escape, unless she leaps out of the window or gets up the chimney: but the former is too high from the ground and the latter too narrow."

"Then we leave you for a few minutes with your servant," said Mr. Malton.

Lady Bess accordingly passed into the bed-chamber, while the two lawyers stayed outside upon the landing.

"Fear nothing," said the amazzone lady, in the lowest possible whisper to her servant the instant they were thus alone together. "Your master is unsuspected—I have smothered him. My plans are all arranged. And now at once begin talking loud, as if you were lamenting my misfortune while dressing my wound."

The truth is that Lady Bess had no wound at all—nor had she sustained any injury beyond a slight contusion or two from the fall in the road. The idea of the wound and the ghastly story of the blood streaming into her boot, was a ready invention on her part, and which Rosa had at once comprehended, for the purpose of obtaining this opportunity of ascending to her chamber in company with the servant.

"Oh, my dear, dear mistress!" exclaimed Rosa, affecting a voice of lamentation and distress: "what trouble you have got yourself into! How did all this happen? What does it mean? Well, well, poor dear lady, I won't worry you. I dare say you will tell me all about it another time. But, O dear me! what a wound! Why you must have cut yourself with a sharp flintstone, or something. You would certainly have bled to death if you had gone without having the wound dressed. And the boot too—almost filled with blood! the stocking dripping wet! dear me, dear me!"

In this strain did Rosa go on talking, at the same time trotting about the room and making a clatter with the things just as if she were in the excitement of a tremendous bustle to get all that was necessary under the circumstances. But in the meanwhile what was Lady Bess herself doing?

The instant she had given those hurried and softly whispered instructions to Rosa, she delayed not in carrying into execution the plan which had suggested itself to her while she was arriving thither in the carriage. She looked at her watch: it wanted exactly twenty-five minutes to two o'clock.

No time to lose! Taking a very small scrap of paper, she wrote thereon the following lines:—

Deletzyd—szcdpd.

Ozgpo—Oz dxxpestyr ez aczgp* hld le jzfc szfp estp trse.

Ehpyej xtyfepd ez ehz.

Having folded up this little scrap of paper into the smallest possible compass, she tied a small piece of silken thread around it; which being done, she hastily whispered to Rosa, "Make some good rattling noise while I open the window."

Rosa instantaneously obeying this order commenced no inconsiderable din with the basin and jug and other things on the washing-stand, during which clatter Lady Bess opened the casement, the noise thereof being drowned in the din of the crockery-ware. She now reached forth her hand, and took in a large wicker b' d-cage which hung just outside the window. This cage contained two beautiful doves of the carrier-breed. One of these doves the amazonian lady took forth from the cage, and in less than a minute tied the little scrap of paper with the silken cord under its wing. She then opened her hand, and the messenger-bird flew out of the window, instantaneously disappearing in the obscurity of the night.

Meanwhile, in pursuance of another rapidly-whispered command from her mistress, Rosa had fastened the two sheets of the bed together, and had tied one extremity to the bed-post, which was near the casement.

"In two or three days I shall be back again, safe and sound. Don't fear; nothing can be done to you—and your cousin John is unsuspected!"

Having whispered these words, Lady Bess lost not another instant in passing herself out of the casement; and with wondrous agility and skill, she glided down the twisted sheets, so that with but a slight fall she reached the ground in safety.

To hasten to the stable—put the saddle and bridle on the horse—and lead forth the noble animal, was now the work of but a couple of minutes; then vaulting on its back, Lady Bess was borne away like an arrow shot from a bow.

In the meantime Rosa had gone on talking in the room in the same strain as before, and precisely as if her mistress was still there. The two solicitors, who were out on the landing,

failed not to catch most of what the woman uttered, although for delicacy's sake they had not approached nearer to the door than the narrowness of the landing rendered necessary. All that we have described from the moment Lady Bess entered her chamber with Rosa, until she flitted away on the back of her noble steed, barely occupied a quarter of an hour; and that was no great length of time to examine a wound—wash it—fasten bandages on it—and allow for taking off and putting on those garments that it was necessary to remove and change. At least such was the calculation made relative to the lapse of minutes by the two lawyers. Yet, towards the end of the interval named, a feeling of uneasiness and a sense of misgiving began to creep into the minds of both. Not that they thought Lady Bess was too long in her chamber; but those continuous outpourings of lamentations, ejaculations, and comments on the part of Rosa, added to the din she had created with the crockery-ware, struck them as being suspicious: for it all looked as if the woman were playing a part,—a part too which she was now overdoing. They were therefore just on the point of knocking at the door, and insisting upon Lady Bess coming forth, when they were struck with consternation on hearing the sudden trampling of the horse's feet as he was being led from the stable.

"By heaven, we are tricked!" exclaimed Marlow: and without ceremony he rushed into the bed-chamber.

The open window and the rope of sheets which Rosa was just dragging in, told the tale.

"Wretch!" cried Marlow, "you have aided your Mistress's escape! But you shall go to prison for her!"

"Let her alone," exclaimed Mr. Maiton. "We will punish the guilty one yet!"—and he rushed down the stairs, closely followed by his partner.

"Why did you not stop her? Don't you see that she has escaped?" cried Marlow, addressing himself fiercely to the coachman.

"I saw some one, sir, gallop ro' from the back of the house and away like a shot," answered the man: "but how could I pos her? I scarcely knew who it till she was out of sight: an

was only suspicion, for she whisked by at such a rate."

"True!" cried Marlow, "the window is at the back of the house—the stable also. Well, John, I was wrong to blame you. But now, what is to be done?" he demanded, turning to his partner. "We shall be the laughing-stock of all London if we let her escape us thus."

"Besides," added Mr. Malton, "it is more than ever imperative that the outraged laws should be satisfied."

"But what is to be done?" again asked Mr. Marlow, more excited than before.

"Depend upon it she means to get out of the country," responded the junior partner after a few moments' reflection.

"I tell you what we must do. We will go on to your house, and snatch a few hours' sleep—then off by the first trains in the morning—one of us to Dover and the other to Liverpool. Frances and America—these are the alternatives for this desperate woman!"

"Yes—that is our course," returned Marlow. "I would not for a thousand guineas that she escaped us in the long run."

The two lawyers then entered the carriage, which immediately drove away to Mr. Marlow's mansion, which was about a mile distant.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MESSENGER-BIRD

A LITTLE beyond Gravesend there stood a small public house, in a somewhat lonely spot, though by the side of the main road. The landlord of this place, which bore the name of the *Dancing Bear*, was called Israel Patch, and was a younger brother of the keeper of the boozing-ken in London. Not merely was he the brother of Solomon, but Israel was of kindred character and pursuits,—his public-house being the resort of all the desperate characters of the district, especially the smugglers belonging to the Thames and Medway. The *Dancing Bear* had long been the object of suspicion on the part of the local authorities; but so cunningly had Israel managed matters, that he had never done any overt act, which could be positively brought home to him.

Israel Patch was a widower, but had a grown-up daughter living with him to superintend his establishment. She was a woman of about thirty, remarkably ugly, and in every way of a character fitted to aid her father in his money-making and nefarious pursuits. Her Christian name was Rebecca; but she was universally known amongst the frequenters of the house by the diminutive of *Becky*.

We must now observe that Israel Patch slept in a little room behind his bar on the ground-floor: but Becky slept in an attic quite on the top of the house. This attic had no flat ceiling to separate it from the sloping roof, but may be described as being covered only by the roof itself—in plain terms, it was just beneath the tiles. On a flat portion of this roof there appeared a very singular contrivance—namely, a little trap-door of a foot square, made of a piece of wood not much thicker than a good stout cardboard. It was retained by two little hinges on one side; and as it opened downward, it had a very slight and flexible steel spring fixed underneath to keep it shut. As a matter of course, if this spring were taken away the little trap-door would drop downward; and it must likewise be understood that the spring was so slight that while it was but just strong enough to sustain the door, the slightest weight touching the door on the uppermost side would make it sink down. But this was not quite all; for a little bell was suspended to the rafters close by the trap-door; and by another simple contrivance it was so arranged that if the trap-door opened by being pressed downward it caused this bell to ring. Every night, before retiring to rest, Rebecca Patch opened the little trap-door: and thrusting her arm through to the roof, drew in three small saucers. One she filled with water—the second with tares or parched peas—and the third with salt; then having done this, she put the saucers out upon the roof again in a little sort of wooden recess or hutch, the object of which was merely to prevent the salt from being saturated with wet in case of rain. This was Rebecca's nightly duty, and which she fulfilled with the utmost regularity.

We may now continue our tale. It was two o'clock in the morning when Becky Patch was suddenly startled from her sleep by the tinkling of the little bell; and though its sound could

scarcely have awakened any person under ordinary circumstances, yet by dint of habit the least note thereof would arouse up Israel Patch's daughter as effectually as if a cannon were fired close by her ears. Springing from her couch, Becky, instantaneously lighted a candle, coaxingly extended her arm towards a pigeon which now appeared perched on the upper rail of a chair immediately under the little trap-door. The bird, with instinctive tameness, seemed to recognise a known friend, and immediately flew on the woman's wrist. She caressed and addressed it in fondling terms: then she refreshed it with water—and having done this, looked beneath its wing. Thence she unfastened the little scrap of paper which was tied there; and calculating for a moment the day of the month, muttered to herself, "The letter L is the key.

Then she hastily glanced over the contents of the billet, upon which she made a cross with a pen; and having forthwith folded it up again, she replaced it under the bird's wing. This being done, she gave the feathered messenger some peculiar kind of food which she always had in readiness in the room; and the little carrier being thus refreshed, was put forth through the trap-door again. It immediately took wing and sped away on its important errand.

"Twenty minutes to two when the bird was sent off," muttered Rebecca to herself: then as she took an old silver watch from under her pillow and saw that it was now about ten minutes past two, she observed, "There's plenty of time."

She then put on some clothing, and descending the stairs, proceeded to the little room where her father slept.

"Well, what is it?" exclaimed Israel Patch, as he started up in his couch.

"A message," responded his daughter. "Lady Bess has sent it. You must have a horse in readiness. The despatch is dated twenty minutes to two—and it is now nearly a quarter past."

"What a time the bird has been in coming!" ejaculated Patch.

"No such thing," rejoined his daughter. "The dove was here in twenty minutes after it was sent on the wing; and that is doing more than a mile a minute, taking the distance from Lady Bess's to his place. It is me that have delayed somewhat in coming down, as I saw that there was

no hurry. Besides, I had to feed the bird—hadn't I?"

"Well, you can go up to bed again. I will dress myself, get the horse in readiness, and wait."

Rebecca Patch left her father the candle which she had brought with her; and then remounting the stairs, gained her attic and lay down to rest once more.

Rapid as the flight of that pigeon which bore the mysterious billet beneath its wing, must we transport the reader to another public-house much farther along the same road. Indeed, this latter was about four miles on the London side of Canterbury. It was situated on the summit of Boughton Hill at no great distance from a village, but completely isolated therefrom. The sign raised upon the top of a tall post, was daubed with such an effigy of a *Red Dragon* as the painter's imagination had suggested. The house of sombre and dilapidated appearance, with so suspicious a look that no solitary traveller with a well-filled purse in his pocket wood choose such a hostel as a resting-place for the night. It was kept by a man and his wife named Dean; and they, as the reader may suspect, were not a whit more particular how they made money than either Solomon Patch in London or his brother Israel, near Gravesend. They had a son—a lad of about eighteen, whose Christian name was Joseph. He was an intelligent, shrewd, keen fellow, having well profited by the parent's example in such wrong-sided experience of the world as he was likely to glean therefrom.

This lad slept by himself up in a garret—or rather a sort of loft on the top of the house; and here might be observed precisely the same curious apparatus fixed in the roof as we have described in reference to the attic at the *Dancing Bear*. There was the little trap-door lightly sustained by the steel spring—the small bell—and the hutch with the three saucers on the tiles outside. With the same regularity as Rebecca Patch observed in replenishing those saucers, did Joe Dean perform the same duty; and with equal sensitiveness was he ready to start up from his slumbers at the slightest summons of the metallic tongue of the monitor-bell. About the head of his truckle-bed a common pinchbeck watch was suspended by a dirty riband to a nail fastened in the wall.

The hands of that watch indicated that it was exactly half-past two o'clock, on that same night—or rather morning—of which we are speaking, when Joe Dean was suddenly awakened from his sleep by the tinkling chime of the bell. He started up, lighted his candle, and took the messenger-bird, which having alighted on the trap-door, had sunk down with it into the room. Then ensued precisely the same process as we have already described at the *Dancing Bear*. Joe Dean, having first of all given the bird some water, detached the billet from beneath its wing—read its contents—made a mark upon it with a pen—folded it up again—and attached it once more to the pinion of the feathered messenger. Having fed and caressed the dove, he let it loose again through the trap-door; and away it sped on the third and last stage of its aerial journey. The lad, having noticed the time by his watch, thereupon went downstairs and communicated to his father the nature of the message which had just been received.

Again must we transport the reader's attention to some distance; and this time we halt at Dover. There, in one of the principal streets, was a tavern of respectable appearance, bearing the sign of the *Admiral's Head*. It was kept by an old man named Marshall, who in his younger days had served on board one of the privateers which Dover in the war-time was wont to send forth to prey upon the French maritime commerce. His father had been the owner and captain of the privateer, and had amassed some little money, with which at the Peace he had established himself at the *Admiral's Head*. Robert Marshall, the present owner of the place, was considered to be a respectable man enough. His house was well frequented; and he was known to be comfortable in his circumstances. He was always regular in his attendance at church—subscribed to charities—sent the clergyman of the parish a handsome present at Christmas—and never had any complaints made against his house on the score of irregularity or disorder. He therefore stood uncommonly well with the leading persons in the town; and if a whisper did now and then circulate that old Bob Marshall had excellent French brandy in his establishment which had never passed the Custom House, or that his wife and daughters went to church on Sundays in French silks,

gloves, and shoes, upon which no duty had ever been paid to the British Government,—Bob Marshall was not wanting in influential friends to take up the cudgels on his behalf and defend him against what they declared to be a most scandalous imputation.

Mr. Marshall had three daughters, whose ages averaged from about eighteen to twenty-four; and very fine, good looking, and genteel young women they were. The oldest, whose Christian name was Catherine—familiarly abbreviated into Kate—had from her girlhood been very fond of keeping poultry, pigeons, and other favourites of the feathered tribe in the large stable-yard in the rear of the tavern. Especially had she a very choice and beautiful breed of doves, to which she was greatly attached; and though some of the neighbours found that these birds were wont to get upon the tops of their houses and displace the tiles, they never complained angrily, because old Marshall was invariably so ready to have any such damage repaired at his own expence, and Miss Kate, was sure to make compensation by sending a fat turkey or a brace of pullets as a propitiation at Christmas. But of all the friends and acquaintances of the Marshalls who were aware of the eldest young lady's fondness for the feathered tribe, not one of them was ever admitted to the knowledge of the circumstance that she had a bed-chamber prettily fitted up the highest storey of the house, and that in the roof of his chamber there were precisely the same contrivances as those which we have already explained at the *Red Dragon* on Boughton Hill and the *Dancing Bear* near Gravesend. Yet such was the fact: and in that neat little but somewhat airily situated chamber, did Kate Marshall sleep; and whenever the tinkling bell sounded she was as ready to spring from her couch as either Joe Dean or Bucky Patch at their respective habitations.

An elegant little French time-piece standing upon the chest of drawers, intimated that it wanted ten minutes to three o'clock, when the tinkling summons was given: and Miss Kate was suddenly startled from a very pleasant dream in which the image of her intended husband—the captain of a small trading vessel—was conspicuous. Leaping from the couch, she at once perceived by the aid of her night-

lamp, which she always kept burning, a beautiful carrier-pigeon upon a rail a couple of feet below the trap-door. Her plump white arm was immediately outstretched to receive the little messenger; and the next moment the sweet bird was fondly nestling in its kind friend's bosom. Then she gave it water; and detaching the little billet from beneath its wing, hastily opened it. A small manuscript-book which she took from a drawer, and which was filled with dates, references, and initial letters, promptly refreshed her memory so as to supply the key to the reading of the scroll, which without such a clue would necessarily have been a mere jargon as incomprehensible as the Egyptian hieroglyphics. Having made herself acquainted with the words upon the paper, she proceeded to administer food to the bird. This being done, she fondled and caressed it again for a minute or two, and then let it escape through the trap-door in the roof of her chamber.

Kate Marshall now hastily slipped on some clothing, and stealing down stairs, knocked gently at the chamber where her father and mother slept. Mr. Marshall immediately rose, put on a dressing-gown, and admitted his daughter.

"A message, I suppose?" he at once said as he entered the room.

"From Lady Bess," responded Kate. "Here it is. The key is the letter L. The pigeon was sent off at twenty minutes to two and arrived here at ten minutes to three—one hour and ten minutes in all!"

"And what's the distance, Kate?" asked Mrs. Marshall.

"Why, mother, by the road, Dover is seventy-two miles from London, you know," responded the daughter; "and then allowing that Lady Bess's cottage is five miles from London, the whole distance would be seventy-seven. But then, as the bird flies, it would not be much more than seventy, making a mile a minute, inclusive of the short stoppages at the two stations on the road."

While Miss Kate was thus speaking, her father had deciphered the scrap of paper, and had then burnt it by the flame of the candle.

"Well, there is plenty of time to tutor your sisters and the servants what to say," the old man immediately observed, "Some hours must elapse before she will be here, although with

the relays she has ordered she will no doubt gallop like the wind. The little bird has performed its message well: for the two marks were made in the corner of the paper—were they not?"

"Yes—in the usual way," responded Kate, "and therefore there is no doubt that the pigeon stopped both at Gravesend and Boughton."

"Well, you can go up to bed again, Kate," said her father, "But be up by six o'clock, and then we will arrange what is to be said."

"Yes—but did you not observe," asked the young woman, "that something is to be done at once, to prove ——"

"To be sure! I have it," exclaimed the astute Marshall. "I know what I will do. Leave it all to me—and you go up to bed, Kate."

His daughter accordingly left the room, and Mr. Marshall at once proceeded to dress himself with the utmost despatch. He then quitted the chamber, telling his wife that he should not be many minutes absent. Descending the stairs, he opened the front door of the tavern, taking the key in his pocket so as to be able to let himself in again; and hurrying along the street, at length stopped at a house where the coloured lamp burning over the door indicated the abode of a surgeon. Marshall rang the night-bell with some degree of violence; and in a few minutes the door was opened by the medical man's assistant.

"Hallo! is that you, Mr. Marshall?" he exclaimed, immediately recognizing the tavern-keeper. "is there anything the matter up at the *admiral's Head*?"

"Yes—a lady who arrived last evening has been seized with a fit. She's a little better now, as my daughters are attending upon her: but I want you to give me a composing draught, or something of the kind, so as to prevent a relapse. I am sorry to have disturbed you——"

"Don't mention it, Mr. Marshall," immediately exclaimed the assistant; "It's all in the way of business. Come into the surgery, and I will see what I can do for you—unless you think it is a case for which I had better call up Mr. Hood:—" alluding to his master.

"No, not at all," rejoined the tavern-keeper. "I dare say you can give something that will answer the purpose, if I describe what sort of a fit it was."

"Oh, certainly!" replied the assistant; "and then Mr. Hood will call round in the morning and see the lady."

While thus speaking, the assistant led the way into the surgery: and old Marshall described the ordinary symptoms of an hysterical fit. The assistant speedily compounded a draught; and as he wrote out the label to put upon the bottle, he asked, "What name shall I say?"

"Mrs. Chandos," was old Marshall's prompt answer.

The name was accordingly written upon the label; and Marshall, thanking the assistant for his attention took his departure. Returning to his house, he ascended to his chamber, undressed himself again, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE JOURNEY

WE must now return to Lady Bess whom we left at the moment when seated on her gallant steed she fled from her cottage in the manner already described. Making the best of her way into London, she crossed Blackfriar's Bridge, and proceeded straight for the Kent Road. In an hour and a quarter from the time she had quitted the cottage she entered upon Blackheath. There she walked her horse—although the noble animal, as if instinctively aware of its mistress's need, appeared impatient to career onward again.

The dauntless amazon was in the highest possible spirits, not only at the achievement she had already performed in effecting her escape from the lawyers, but likewise at the measures she had taken to disentangle herself in the long run from the meshes of the law and be able to turn round and laugh in their faces. She thought of Turpin's memorable ride to York—an exploit which had saved him from the strong arm of justice on that occasion, it being held impossible for a man who appeared at York at day-break to have committed a crime in London on the preceding evening—the distance being close on two hundred miles! But Lady Bess's stratagem, as she had devised it, was if possible still more ingenious; and the evidence to be eventually given in her favour, would be still more conclusive, as the reader will presently see.

It was now three o'clock in the morning—and she had sixty-four miles to ride! But this distance she was confident of being able to achieve within a very few hours, although it formed no part of her plan to intimate Dick Turpin in the astounding feat of accomplishing the journey with the same horse.

Having breathed her gallant courser for a few minutes on Blackheath, Lady Bess gave it the rein; and away, away it flew with an astonishing velocity.

"Fifteen miles" from this point to Gravesend—or rather sixteen hence to the *Dancing Bear*—and I must do the distance in an hour!"

Thus she spoke aloud, her flute-like voice sounding melodiously through the fresh air of morning. The twilight was glimmering in the east—very faintly as yet, but still it was appearing: and she thought to herself that she would yet ride many a mile ere the sun rose—aye, and many a long mile more too, ere it should be very high above the horizon. The exhilaration which she felt amounted almost to an intoxication. She was as happy as if not the slightest danger hung over her head,—happier indeed, for it was in consequence of that danger she was now pursuing an adventure so thoroughly congenial to her daring, dauntless, reckless character. Her horse needed not the touch of spur or whip: an occasional caress with the hand and the encouraging voice of its mistress impelled the animal to the development of all its powers of swiftness—and never did the lithe and graceful Arab courser dash with a more lightning speed over the arid desert than Lady Bess's gallant horse along the high road to Dover. The weather at that hour in the morning and in the genial month of June was delicious, with just a sufficient freshness of breeze to cool down the perspiration of the flying animal, and to heighten into the richest glow the bloom upon its rider's cheeks. She felt a buoyancy of spirits and a lightness of heart such as she had never experienced before. Though always of a free, and jovial, and careless disposition, yet now her happiness was a delirium—a whirl of bliss—an ecstasy. The blood ran like lightning in her veins; and from time to time her merry laugh rang through the air like a peal of silver bells, as she thought of the glorious feat of outwitting the two keen and cunning lawyers.

Now the town of Dartford is reached: she somewhat relaxes the speed of her horse, so as not to excite suspicion should any loiterer or early riser be about, by dashing through the street at too tremendous a pace. But scarcely are the limits of the sleeping town cleared, when away she flies again along the well-beaten road. Now she has a glimpse of the Thames as it winds its way past Greenhithe—then she loses sight of it again; but in a few minutes more she obtains a fuller view of the broad and ample flood as she passes over an eminence near North-fleet. Onward still, with an unrelaxing speed, the dark chesnut flies—Gravesend is reached—again she checks the noble animal in his career—but not a soul appears in the street, and in a few minutes more she dashes up to the front of the *Dancing Bear*. She looks at her watch—'tis four o'clock—and she is exultant!

At the same moment that she springs from her steed the stable door of the public-house is thrown open, and Israel Patch comes forth leading another horse ready caparisoned. If not quite so elegant in its appearance as the dark chesnut, the relay-courser is but little inferior, and gives promise of no mean capacity for the work that is to be done. Few and rapid are the words which pass between Lady Bess and Israel Patch; and the moment her own steed is conducted into the stable, she bids him bring her forth a draught of ale—a command which he loses no time to obey. The amazon drinks but a portion of the tankard's foaming contents: then springing upon the fresh steed, away she flies again.

"Twenty-nine miles hence to Boughton," she exclaims aloud; "and I must do the distance within a few minutes of two hours! Yes—it can be done—it shall be done!" she cries with enhancing exultation, as she is now well assured of the capabilities and powers of the steed which at present bestrides.

The sun has risen—light has broken with gradual step upon the earth, and breathed the breath of life into the hitherto pulseless veins of slumber-locked creation. The orb of day breaks out in glory upon the world—nature is wakening from her trance—but all the night-dews remain upon her breast, like sparkling gems on the bosom of an Oriental sultana aroused by the break of morning from the voluptuous cushions whereon she has reposed.

The loveliness of the scene—the

freshness of the morn—the gay caroling of the birds—the myriad tiny voices in which the insect world was speaking—all had the effect of elevating Lady Bess's spirits to the highest point. Onward speeds the horse—by heaven! she begins to think that its powers, its energies, its action are all equal to those of her own gallant dark chesnut! Now she reins him in for a moment to walk him through a road-side pond—and twice she leaped down to wash his mouth with a bunch of long grass damp with the pearly dew. He seems to recognise these attentions—to know that he is made much of—and also to be aware that he has a duty to perform in return. Yes—for a specific task is set—that good steed must be at Boughton ere the hand of his rider's watch marks the hour of six. On, on, then there is not an instant to lose!—on, on! Ah! the goal is in view—there is the tall signpost—and in a few moments more the panting steed halts in front of the *Red Dragon*. Again does Lady Bess look at her watch: bravo! it still wants ten minutes to six o'clock!

At the public-house which she has now reached a fresh horse is in readiness. The man Dean has not neglected the message delivered through the agency of the carrier-pigeon. A few rapid words are exchanged—another sip of ale taken—and away speeds Lady Bess on the last stage of her journey. Nineteen miles are before her—it will take an hour and a quarter to accomplish that distance; but she will enter Dover a few minutes after seven o'clock!

Away she speeds—four miles are soon dashed over—and then she reaches the outskirts of Canterbury. But as at this hour many persons are astir and she does not choose to court observation, she makes a slight circuit so as to avoid passing through the place altogether. She knows all that part of the country well—each lane, each turning: and in few minutes does she emerge upon the high road again on the furthermost outskirts of Canterbury.

The relay-steed which she obtained at the *Red Dragon* was equal to the former—equal too as near as might be to her own; and thus she gallops on like the wind. Without impediment—but in exultation, in almost frenzied joy—in a perfect delirium of delight—is mile after mile passed over;—and now at length the towering heights and gloomy fortalice of Dover Castle break upon her view.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" her voice rings out in swelling harmony to the breeze that already seems fresh with the salt taste derived from the sea.

Dover is reached: she looks at her watch again—it is ten minutes past seven! She has ridden from the northern outskirts of London in five hours and a half!

Immediately on her arrival at the *Admiral's Head*, Lady Bess was hurried up-stairs by Kate Marshall and her sisters to bed-chamber; and there the three young women embraced her in the enthusiasm of admiration for the feat which she had performed. They then assisted to disapparel her of her male garments; and Lady Bess was by no means sorry to stretch her stiff and wearied limbs in the comfortable couch. Kate sat down by the bed-side, and explained to her the stratagem which her father had adopted the moment the carrier-bird brought the despatch upwards of four hours previously. One of her sisters hastened down stairs to procure breakfast for the intrepid traveller; while the other sister bustled about to put the masculine garments out of the way, and substitute for them a female garb which Kate's wardrobe furnished; and as the elder Miss Marshall was nearly as possible of the same height and figure as Lady Bess, there was no fear of the raiment proving unsuitable. The bottle of medicine which had been procured from Mr. Hood's assistant, was emptied, and then conspicuously placed on the table near the bed just as if its contents had been duly imbibed by her whose name appeared on the label.

Breakfast was speedily brought up; and Lady Bess did most ample justice to it. By the time she had finished her meal and the things were cleared away, it was eight o'clock; and in order to render the stratagem in respect to the surgeon as complete as possible, old Marshall stepped down the street to fetch him.

In a few minutes Mr. Hood was duly escorted by Mrs. Marshall into the pretended invalid's chamber. The surgeon was a middle-aged man, of rather a benevolent countenance, and of pleasing address. He had been long established in Dover and was much respected. If he had a fault, it was in a certain sneaking affection which he cherished for money; and therefore when he observed a well-filled purse lying upon the table close by his

empty bottle, he could not help feeling pleased at having a patient evidently so well able to remunerate him for his services.

Lady Bess put on the most lugubrious look it was possible for her handsome and healthy countenance to assume; and if the doctor had only seen her playing so fine a part with the breakfast a quarter of an hour previous, he would assuredly have fancied that a lady possessed of such an appetite must be endowed with a fair constitution.

"Well how are we this morning?" he asked, in his blandest tones, as he took Lady Bess's hand. "Pulse somewhat feverish—oh?"

Lady Bess thought that Mr. Hood's pulse would be very likely to beat quickly if he had ridden nearly eight miles in five hours and a half: but though she experienced an almost irresistible inclination to burst out into the merriest laugh, she nevertheless so far controlled herself as to subdue that desire and modulate her voice into faint and languid tones, as she said, "I feel somewhat better now, doctor. But I was very, very ill in the night; and I feared that the fit was coming on just now again when the landlord went to fetch you."

"Ah! you must have another draught," said Mr. Hood. "No appetite, I suppose?"

"Not in the least," answered Lady Bess; and she thought it would be very odd if she had after the quantities of cold fowl, ham, and buttered toast she had partaken of within the past half-hour.

"Well, you must have a little gruel presently, with a piece of dry toast," said Mr. Hood.

"I am convinced I never should be able to take it," rejoined Lady Bess; and Kate Marshall turned away to the window in order to prevent herself from bursting out into a laugh in the doctor's face.

"Oh! you must take some sustenance," exclaimed Mr. Hood; "but of a light character, for you are still feverish. When did this indisposition commence?"

The lady arrived here last evening about seven o'clock," Mr. Marshall hastened to observe; "and she complained very soon afterwards—didn't she, Kate?"

"Yes, mother," was the response given by the eldest daughter.

"And then it was a little after three

in the morning, I suppose, that you got so bad, ma'am?" said the doctor, addressing his patient; "for I learn from my assistant that it was about that time he was rung up."

"I really took no note of the hour," answered Lady Bess; "but I know that I had been suffering ever since I went to bed, before the fit seized upon me."

Mr. Hood remained a few minutes longer with his patient, asking her certain requisite questions—or we should rather say, certain questions which he considered requisite; and then he took his leave, promising to send another draught in the course of the forenoon, and desiring that he might be fetched if any change should take place in her condition.

When the doctor had fairly quitted the room, Lady Bess gave vent to her long pent up mirth in peals of the most joyous laughter, wherein she was joined by Kate, who remained with her, Mrs. Marshall having left the room with the doctor to escort him down stairs.

"And how do you really feel?" inquired Kate, when the paroxysm of that convulsive merriment was over.

"I feel somewhat tired and stiff," responded Lady Bess, wiping away the tears which had rolled down her cheeks in the excess of her mirth: "but in all other respects I never was better, and certainly never happier. I am not one, my dear Kate, who after an extraordinary exhilaration of the spirits, receives a reaction leading into a proportionate despondency. I am pretty nearly always the same—sometimes more elated perhaps—but very seldom, if ever depressed. And now let me give you the history of that pleasant little adventure of mine which has compelled me to perform this feat."

The amazon thereupon recounted the incidents of the previous night, which are already known to the reader; and Kate laughed heartily at her friend's ludicrous description of the discomfiture which the two lawyers had experienced.

"Now I do not think they are positively vindictive," added Lady Bess; "but they are keen, sharp fellows, and have got it into their heads that, being lawyers, they must vindicate what is called the majesty of the law. So, it is highly probable that they will have instituted a hue and cry, or else a chase after me. Perhaps, even, they may make their appearance in Dover pre-

sently, in the idea that I shall endeavour to escape into France. Well, let them come: I most cordially hope they will—for it is better to have the thing examined into down here and have done with it, than have to wait till I return to London and then send for all you as witnesses. But what time is the first train down?"

"About eleven o'clock for the French mails," replied Kate.

"And it is now about half-past eight," said Lady Bess, referring to her watch which lay upon the table by the bedside. Well, I can at least reckon upon two or three hours' good sleep."

"For which purpose I will therefore leave you," said Kate; but as she was about to open the door, she turned round, and with an arch smile upon her very good-looking countenance, said, "Shall I bring you up the gruel and toast at eleven?"

"Rather say a good luncheon, my dear friend," responded Lady Bess, with another merry laugh: and then as Kate Marshall closed the door, the female highwayman turned round in her couch and composed herself off to sleep as calmly and tranquilly as if there were not even the remotest chance of being brought into collision with the authorities.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RESULT.

IT was a little after midday when a short, elderly bustling gentleman, accompanied by one of the Dover police-constables, entered the *Admiral's Head*, and proceeding straight up to the bar, inquired for the landlord. Old Marshall, who from the window of his parlour behind the bar immediately observed the visitors and of course guessed their errand, came forth with the coolest self-possession imaginable; and the police-officer at once said, "Mr. Marshall, we want to have a few minutes' conversation with you, if you please."

"To be sure: step in here," responded the landlord: and he accordingly admitted the bustling gentleman and the constable into the bar-parlour, where his wife and three daughters were seated. "But if it's private," the old man immediately exclaimed, "we can go into another room."

The constable looked at Mr. Marlow,—for he the gentleman was,—for him to give an answer; and the London solicitor at once said, "I presume these ladies are of your family?"

"My wife and daughters, sir," responded old Marshall.

"Then there can be no harm in my putting before them the questions which I have to ask. In a word, do you happen to have an individual—or to be more explicit, a woman in male attire, beneath your roof?"

"Well, I never!" whispered Miss Kate to her sisters: but purposely loud enough to be heard by the lawyer and constable.

"A what, sir?" exclaimed old Marshall, affecting the utmost astonishment.

"Well, then, I see that she is not here," observed Mr. Marlow, turning to the constable. "This is the eighth or ninth tavern we have visited, and everywhere the same negative answer. But I am determined to inquire at all the taverns in Dover, sooner than give up the chase."

"But why do you persist in thinking, sir," asked the constable, "that she is in Dover?"

"I have no reason beyond my belief that she will try and get over to France. However, we have set a watch for the railway trains——"

At this moment the doctor's boy made his appearance at the bar; and depositing a bottle on the counter shouted out, "Mrs. Chandos!" and then hurried away to deliver the remaining contents of his basket.

"Mrs. Chandos?" ejaculated Mr. Marlow. "By heaven, it is she!"

"Yes, sir," old Marshall promptly observed, "there is a lady of that name in the house."

"Enough, enough!" cried the excitable attorney. "Show us up to her room! Come along, constable—the bird's caught at last!"—and he was already rushing with frantic haste out of the bar when old Marshall's voice called him back.

"Where are you going, sir—and with this constable too? The lady is in bed and ill? But is there anything wrong about her? I'm sure I took her for a most respectable person——"

"Wrong about her? respectable person?" ejaculated Mr. Marlow. "Why, she's a robber—a thief——"

"Good heavens, girls!" shrieked forth Mrs. Marshall; "do go and count the plate. A thief did you say, sir?"

"Yes—but a most daring thief, too—a highwayman—or rather a highwaywoman!"

"Oh, dear, dear!" cried Mrs. Marshall, appearing to be dreadfully alarmed. Only think of our having had such a desperate character in the house all night!"

"It's fortunate we have not every one had our throats cut," said Kate, making herself shudder from head to foot, while her two sisters likewise gave vent to their pretended feelings of terror and dismay.

"Oh! if she's all that!" said old Marshall, "the sooner she's out of the house the better. Go up, one of your girls, and show this gentleman and the constable which is her room. But I hope she will pay her bill, though—and her doctor's too for that matter."

"There must be some mistake," said Mr. Marlow, who for the last few moments had been looking quite bewildered. "One of you talked of her having slept here all night. Why, she can't have been in the house above an hour or two, even if she travelled post the whole way from London: for we know she didn't come by the railway—we have already made inquiries about her there."

"There must be some mistake then," said old Marshall; "for the Mrs. Chandos we are talking of, has been here ever since six or seven o'clock last evening."

"Then it's not the same," ejaculated Marlow. "How singular!—a coincidence of names! But what sort of a looking woman is she?" The Mrs. Chandos I mean must be about six-and-twenty—though when dressed as a man, she of course looks several years younger. Complexion delicate olive—a rich colour on the cheeks—large black eyes—very bright black hair, beautifully curling—full lips, the least thing coarse—splendid teeth—stands about five feet ten, I should think—excellent figure, upright as a dart—and fine voice, strong for a woman but not harsh!"

"Well, I declare," exclaimed Kate, knowing that Lady Bess wanted to be arrested at Dover so as to get the affair terminated in that town, "this description exactly answer the Lady up-stairs."

"The deuce it does!" quickly ejaculated Mr. Marlow, "Then I am on the right scent again. But she didn't come in male attire?"

"Oh! no, sir," responded Kate

with an indignant toss of the head; "or I am sure that she wouldn't have been received into this house. The constable there can tell you that the *Admiral's Head* is of the highest respectability."

"Yes, Miss—that I will warrant," remarked the officer, who had received many a gratuitous drink at the bar of the establishment.

"Well, well, I meant no offence, young lady," quickly rejoined Mr. Marlow. "But do let us endeavour to clear up one point—when did this lady arrive?"

"It was between six and seven last evening, sir," answered Kate; as we have already told you."

"Yes," immediately observed old Marshall, opening an account-book: "here's the entries of what she has had. Tea—Supper—Bed and Breakfast."

"Which last she didn't touch though," added Kate, "because she's so ill."

"So ill indeed," observed old Marshall, "that I was called up in the middle of the night to go to the doctor and get her a draught."

"What o'clock was that?" demanded Mr. Marlow, quickly."

"What o'clock?" responded the landlord, appearing to reflect: "why, I should think about three in the morning."

"Yes, it was just three," immediately interjected Kate; "because I had been sitting up with poor lady!"

"Oh! then, decidedly it is *not* the Mrs. Chandos I mean," said Mr. Marlow, wonderfully perplexed and bewildered. "And yet that extraordinary likeness which appears to exist—But I say, is it possible that I could obtain a glimpse of this Mrs. Chandos of yours without giving her any offence, supposing that it is really not the same?"

"I will go up and see whether she is dressed," said Kate: then suddenly appearing to hesitate, she exclaimed with a frightened look, "But if it should be the highway-woman after all —"

"Then the sooner we get rid of her the better," replied old Marshall. "Come, this thing must be cleared up for our sakes."

"To be sure, to be sure!" exclaimed Mr. Marlow.

"At all events she can't eat you, Kate," said her father.

"Well, I will go," cried the young woman, as if mustering up all her courage.

She accordingly issued from the parlour, and proceeding up-stairs, went at once to Lady Bess's room. This heroine had risen about half-an hour previously, much refreshed by a sound and uninterrupted sleep. She had nearly finished her toilet, and was just putting on the gown which Kate had supplied her in addition to all other requisite articles of female raiment, when the young woman herself thus made her appearance.

"You needn't tell me what it is that has brought you," said Lady Bess, laughing; "for I see by your countenance that the crisis is at hand."

Miss Marshall forthwith explained everything that had just taken place below; but somewhat apprehensive as to the result, and entertaining a very sincere friendship for Lady Bess, she said to her, "Now, my dear Elizabeth, if you really are at all, uncertain about the possible ending of this adventure, do for heaven's sake let me get you out of the house unperceived."

"My dear girl," exclaimed Lady Bess, taking Kate's hand and clasping it warmly, "do I look like a person who entertains any alarm on the subject? Quite the contrary! I am rejoiced that what I wanted to occur has so speedily taken place. And now tell me, how do your garments seem to fit me?"

"Perfectly well," replied Kate, altogether cheered and encouraged by the tone of confidence in which Lady Bess had spoken.

The amazonian Lady surveyed herself in a full-length mirror when Kate had fastened her dress; and the reflection of the image which she beheld on the polished surface of that glass was one whereof she might well be proud. Lady Bess now appeared as a most splendid woman. Her commanding height was relieved by the fine developments of her form, the closely fitting dress setting off the rich feminine contours to the utmost advantage. It was true that so far as her features were concerned, they appeared largely chiselled and for somewhat coarse: but, impossible to gaze upon those dark eyes—the richness of those and luscious lips—the teeth fair even and without the faintest flaw—and the nose of perfect straightness without being compelled to admit the sweetness of beauty was there, yet that the countenance was of a strikingly handsome appearance.

Inasmuch as to suit her male apparel Lady Bess had been accustomed to wear her hair somewhat short—that is to say, long for a man but short for a woman—she had now made the most of it by arranging it in bands; and in its extraordinary luxuriance it seemed that if let loose it would flow down in the richest redundancy upon her shoulders. Shining in its rich natural glossiness, that magnificent raven hair was parted above the high and open forehead which seemed capable of enthroning the noblest thoughts.

From her waist down to her feet the flowing skirt of her dress afforded indications of the sweeping length of those limbs which the drapery now concealed: but as she turned away from the mirror, a glimpse was allowed on the well-rounded ankles, and the admirably shaped feet with their arching insteps. Altogether she was a superb creature, and pity it was that she was what she was!

"Now, have you furnished me with a bonnet, shawl, gloves, parasol, and all those kind of things?" she inquired, with a merry laugh flowing in the flute-like tones of her melodious voice.

"Everything is here," responded Kate, pointing to a chair in the corner where the articles which Lady Bess mentioned had been deposited. "I have chosen the things from my own wardrobe that I thought would best suit your complexion, figure, and appearance. Do let me congratulate you upon your looks in that garb!"

"You like me better, then, as I am now than in the other dress?" said the amazonian lady.

"Yes: I think I do: and yet there is something so dashing and fine in your man's apparel. But you must not put on the bonnet and shawl now! Remember that you are an invalid—on gruel and dry toast," added Kate Marshall in a merry voice. "Seriously speaking, however, what are you going to do?"

"See Mr. Marlow, to be sure," at once responded Lady Bess. "Now show me to your best furnished private apartment, Kate; and I will lie down upon the sofa with as languishing an air of interesting indisposition as I can possibly assume. Then you can introduce Mr. Marlow."

"But upon what pretence?" inquired Kate: "for he scarcely believes now, I think, that our Mrs. Chandos is his Mrs. Chandos."

Tell him that you have very candidly explained to me as much as you thought fit of all that has taken place down stairs; and that I at once, with equal candour, informed you who I am—namely Mrs. Chandos residing at the cottage near Tottenham in the neighbourhood of London. Then he is sure to take the business before the Mayor; and that is just what I warn."

"Come then, Elizabeth," said Kate Marshall; and she forthwith conducted the heroine to a well-furnished parlour on the same storey as the bed-chamber where this colloquy took place.

Having seen the heroine deposit herself with the air of an invalid upon the sofa Kate sped down stairs and returned to the bar-parlour.

"Well," cried Mr. Marlow, with that nervous excitement which was habitual to him, "what have you done?"

"I very candidly informed Mrs. Chandos," returned Kate, "that a solicitor from London and a police-officer belonging to this town had come to inquire for a lady of the same name—and that the lady thus inquired for was represented to be a highway-woman."

"And what did she say?" demanded Mr. Marlow.

"She looked indignant at first, when she thought that allusion was made to herself," continued Kate: "But when I assured her that no one had positively charged her with being the highway-woman thus alluded to, she ceased to be angry. Then, of her own accord, she at once declared that so far as she herself was concerned she was a highly respectable lady, of independent means, and living on the outskirts of London somewhere near Tottenham, I think she said—or Edmonton."

"Then, by heaven! it must be the same, after all;" cried Mr. Marlow. "Tottenham and Edmonton join each other—But go on: what else took place?"

"The lady, with the utmost candour, rejoined Kate, "requests that you will walk up to her room and take the officer with you if you like."

"I shall most assuredly do so," exclaimed the solicitor. "Now, Miss Marshall, be pleased to lead the way."

Kate accordingly retraced her steps up stairs, closely followed by Mr. Marlow and the constable. On reaching the parlour, Kate opened the door; and the very first glimpse which the keen,

sighted attorney caught of Lady Bess, he cried, "It is the same—I know it is! Unless indeed she has a sister as like herself as one pea is like another! Pray, ma'am," he added, advancing towards Lady Bess, "have you a sister?"

"No—I have not, sir," she at once replied, raising herself up to a sitting posture on the sofa where she had previously been reclining.

Mr. Marlow surveyed her for nearly a minute with the most scrutinizing earnestness. He had seen her on many occasions riding about the neighbourhood of Edmonton and Tottenham in female attire; and he had likewise observed her very attentively indeed on the preceding night, during the few minutes he and his partner were in her own elegantly furnished parlour at the cottage. Now, therefore, when he examined her from head to foot with the keenest scrutiny—observed her superb dark eyes—her strongly-marked features, especially the rich fullness of the lips—when he noted, too, the figure, and calculated what must be the stature of this lady on whom he was now gazing, it was impossible he could come to any other conclusion than that he saw before him the female highwayman who had escaped from his clutches during the past night. Therefore, without pausing to reflect any longer upon the astounding evidence he had heard in the bar-parlour to disprove this identity, he suddenly exclaimed, "Well, I am decided! At all risks I give this woman into custody."

"Me, sir, into custody!" exclaimed Lady Bess, with an indignation that was admirably assumed: and her eyes flashed fire upon the attorney.

"Yes—you" he answered: then turning abruptly round towards the officer, he said, "Constable, do your duty."

"Ma'am, you must consider yourself in custody," said the police official to Lady Bess.

"Oh, very well!" she exclaimed. "Whoever this gentleman is—if a gentleman he be—he shall smart for it. There is such a thing as an action for damages in this country."

"We will not bandy words here," said Mr. Marlow. "I suppose the case can be heard at once before the Mayor. You can bring your prisoner along with you; and I will inquire my way to the Town-hall. We will go separately."

With these words Mr. Marlow put

on his hat and whisked out of the room.

"Miss Marshall," said Lady Bess, addressing Kate in the presence of the constable as if speaking to a stranger and an inferior, "fetch me my bonnet and shawl; for I can assure you that I am in as great a hurry to have this matter investigated as the individual who has just quitted the room can possibly be."

Kate accordingly repaired to fetch the things which Lady Bess required; and when our heroine had put on the pretty bonnet, and the new French shawl (never before worn) with which Kate likewise supplied her, she looked so superbly handsome that the police-officer could not help gazing upon her with admiration.

"As this is an affair," observed Kate, pretending to be very serious, "which, as my father says, to some little extent involves the respectability of his establishment, he and my mother, myself and sisters, are all going to the Town-hall."

"Very well, then—you can do as you like," exclaimed Lady Bess, affecting to be somewhat offended by the remark: "but I will proceed thither at once with the officer. Of course," she said, addressing herself to the constable, "you do not wish to subject me to any ignominious treatment: for I can assure you that this is all a mistake, and will speedily be cleared up."

The policeman naturally thought from all he had heard in the bar that it really was a mistake; and he had been much surprised at Mr. Marlow determining to give the lady into charge. Besides, when he looked at her, he could not possibly fancy for a moment that a female with a certain elegant and fashionable air of distinction, could be nothing more than a robber. He therefore assured the lady that he did not wish to subject her to the slightest inconvenience, and that if she would walk in front of him, he would keep at such a distance from her as to prevent the people in the streets from observing that she was in his custody. Therefore, ere quitting the tavern, he gave her a few directions which turnings to take so as to reach the Town-hall. These little arrangements being made, Lady Bess issued forth, the constable keeping in her track, but at an interval of a dozen or fifteen yards.

The Town-hall was reached; and Mr. Marlow, who had got there first, stopped the Mayor from quitting the magisterial seat, as he was about to do,

the morning's business being over. So quietly had the whole thing been managed that nothing of what was going on had got wind through the town; and there were consequently but very few loiterers in the court when Lady Bess was introduced to the presence of the magistrate. Almost immediately after her arrival, old Marshall and his family, accompanied by Mr. Hood and his assistant, made their appearance: for the tavern-keeper had called for the medical men on the way to the Town-hall, telling them what had occurred, and intimating that from all which had transpired in his own bar-parlour he thought their evidence would be wanting. Of course Mr. Hood and the assistant were very much surprised to hear of their patient being in custody on such a serious charge; and they felt assured it must be some extraordinary mistake.

Lady Bess was compelled to enter the dock, the accusation being one of felony against her. But she sat down there with an aspect of calm dignity and of placid confidence, in which however there was not the slightest tinge of bravado nor unseemly hardihood. The Marshalls and the medical men placed themselves on a bench reserved for witnesses; while Mr. Marlow entered the witness-box.

The proceedings then commenced by the prosecutor being sworn. He stated that his name was Sidney Marlow—that he was a solicitor carrying on business in Parliament Street, Westminster—and that his private abode was at Edmonton, also in the county of Middlesex. He then proceeded to describe the circumstances of the attempted robbery, just as they are already known to the reader—not omitting the details of Lady Bess's escape from the cottage: that is to say, so far as he was acquainted with them.

At this stage of the proceedings the Mayor, addressing Lady Bess, said, "The present is so very serious a charge that perhaps you would like to have the case remanded in order that you may procure the assistance of counsel?"—and as he spoke he could not help gazing upon the prisoner in astonishment blended with compassionate interest; for he naturally felt both surprised and grieved that a female of such a prepossessing appearance should have placed herself in what seemed to be a most threatening dilemma.

"I thank your worship for this kind suggestion on your part," answered Lady Bess, "but I think that after your worship has heard a statement which the landlord of the *Admiral's Head* can make, and which all his family can corroborate, you will perceive that I shall have no need for any legal advice."

"Then let Mr. Marshall stand forward," said the Mayor.

The landlord of the *Admiral's Head*, with the blunt honest look that was characteristic of him, and which was calculated to deceive the Evil One himself, stood up and was sworn.

"Now, Mr. Marshall," said Lady Bess, "will you have the kindness to tell his worship at what hour I arrived at your establishment?"

"It was between six and seven o'clock last evening," responded Marshall, with imperturbable gravity.

The Mayor was evidently struck with astonishment: and turning towards Mr. Marlow, he said, "At what hour of the past night was it that your carriage was stopped in the manner you have described?"

"It must have been, as near as I can guess, close upon one o'clock," replied the solicitor.

"Then do you not clearly see," asked the Mayor, "that a perfect *alibi* is proved?"

"I confess, your worship, that I am bewildered," responded Mr. Marlow, "But I should like this young lady"—pointing to Kate—"to be sworn."

"To be sure," said the Mayor. "Miss Marshall, stand forward."

Kate, with as much resoluteness and self-possession as her father had just shown, stepped into the witness-box and unhesitatingly took the oath.

"Now, Miss Marshall," said Mr. Marlow, "what communication did the prisoner make to you relative to her place of abode?"

"She told me, sir," was the response, "that she lived at a cottage somewhere near Tottenham and Edmonton."

"And your worship will observe," exclaimed Mr. Marlow, "that it was at a cottage near Edmonton and Tottenham whence the prisoner, as I maintain, escaped from me in the manner I have described. I submit that the identity is proven."

"At what o'clock, Mr. Marlow?"

asked Lady Bess, "do you allege that I escaped from you? You have stated, that the attack upon your carriage was made about a quarter to one; will you be kind enough to mention how long afterwards it was that the escape took place?"

"About an hour afterwards," responded Marlow: "it was getting on for two."

"At which hour, your worship," said Lady Bess, "I was lying in bed very ill at the tavern kept by Mr. Marshall in Dover. I therefore leave it to your worship to decide whether I could have been at the cottage near London and at the hotel in Dover at one and the same time."

"I think, your worship," said Mr. Hood's assistant, now stepping forward, "that I can give some important evidence in the matter: for though I never saw the prisoner at the bar before in my life, yet I would not for the world remain silent when the character and liberty of a fellow-creature are at stake."

The assistant was accordingly sworn; and he deposed that shortly after three o'clock in the morning, he had been rung up by Mr. Marshall, to furnish a composing draught for a lady who was lying ill at the *Admiral's Head*—that he was told the lady's name was Mrs. Chandos—and that he had written that name on the label accordingly.

Mr. Hood now also requested to be sworn: and this being done, he deposed that at eight o'clock in the morning he had visited Mrs. Chandos, the prisoner at the bar, at the hotel—that he had seen her there—and was confident she was the same lady who now stood in the dock.

"This is the most extraordinary case," said the Mayor, "that ever came before me. Mr. Marshall, you are quite positive that the prisoner arrived at your house last evening between six and seven o'clock?"

"I am as certain, your worship, as that I am now addressing you," was the reply. "My wife and daughters can all prove it. And here," he added, producing a day-book, "are the entries of what the lady had at the hotel. Your worship will perceive that there are entries of tea and supper under yesterday's date. I make up this book every night before I go to bed."

This book was handed up to the Mayor, who examined the items; and then turning to Mr. Marlow, he said

"Really, sir, I think you ought to be satisfied that this is a case of mistaken identity. Has the lady a sister at all resembling her?"

"That, your worship," responded the attorney, "was the very question I put to her in the presence of the constable: and she emphatically replied in the negative. Now observe, your worship—the woman who made the attempted robbery on me and my partner, told me her name was Mrs. Chandos; and the prisoner at the bar says she is Mrs. Chandos. Again the woman who attempted the robbery took me to a cottage which has been described; and the woman at the bar admits that she lives at that cottage. Then again, I have often seen the woman who attempted to rob me riding about Edmonton; I also scrutinized her well between one and two o'clock this morning when she had on her male attire: and I am convinced that the woman at the bar is the same that I have seen riding about Edmonton and whom I beheld in male attire during the past night. Therefore I maintain, that so far as I am concerned, I have proved the identity. I confess that I am staggered and even bewildered by the counter-evidence that has been given; and without for a single instant impeaching the veracity of the Marshalls, of Mr. Hood, or of his assistant, I can only say that if the woman at the bar is not the female highwayman who attempted to rob me and my partner, then from this time forth I shall not be able to put faith in the evidence of my own senses. Under all the circumstances, I think your worship will admit that this is a case which ought to be sent before a superior tribunal; and therefore, I ask your worship to direct that the prisoner at the bar be sent up to London in charge of some officer of your court, with a view to a farther investigation before the magistrate of the district in which the felony was committed. And before I conclude I will observe that a great responsibility rests upon the shoulder worship at the present mo cause if your worship refu mand, the proceedings must gether here, as I should. gusted and he—

can be adopted, and that there may be no chance of a guilty person escaping punishment in consequence of testimony of a somewhat inexplicable nature, I repeat my demand that the prisoner be sent up to London."

"I have little trouble," said the Mayor, after a few minutes' consultation with his clerk, "in giving my judgment in this matter. There are two views that may be taken of the case. Firstly, it is shown by the evidence of a most respectable hotel-keeper of this town that the prisoner at the bar arrived at his house by seven o'clock last evening; and granting that fact to be established, it is totally impossible the prisoner could have committed the assault upon the prosecutor in the middle of the night. Secondly, we have the evidence of a gentleman of unquestionable veracity—Mr. Hood—that he saw the prisoner at the bar at the hotel this morning at eight o'clock. Now, even setting aside Mr. Marshall's evidence altogether, can we suppose that the prisoner, if she had escaped from the cottage near London at a little before two in the morning, could have been at Dover at eight? There was no railway train by which she could arrive. Had she travelled post the whole distance, which I compute to be from Edmonton to Dover nearly eighty miles, she could not have done it in the time. As for her performing such a journey on horseback in so short a period, the idea is out of the question. Such a feat could only be accomplished by frequent relays, ordered and arranged beforehand: for to obtain several consecutive changes of horses at such hours, when road-side inns are all shut up and their inmates asleep, would occasion a waste of time far beyond what can enter into the present computation. In addition, however, to the evidence of Mr. Marshall, proving that the lady was at his hotel at seven o'clock last evening—and to that of Mr. Hood, proving that she was there at eight this morning—we have the circumstantial evidence spoken to by the assistant, proving that she was there soon after three this morning. Therefore, taking all these facts into consideration, I can only come to one conclusion: namely, that it is a case of mistaken identity under very extraordinary circumstances; and I have no alternative but to declare the *alibi* most satisfactorily established,

and to discharge the prisoner from custody."

Mr. Marlow slapped his hand violently down upon the ledge of the witness-box, and exclaimed, "Well, sir, I can scarcely blame you for the decision to which you have come, considering all that has transpired: and here therefore the matter drops. But in future I shall believe in nothing I hear, see, or touch. If anybody tells me at noonday that the sun is shining, I shall answer that it may possibly be so, but it is not certain."

Having thus spoken with excited volubility, Mr. Marlow bowed to the Mayor and hurried out of the court.

Lady Bess then returned to the *Admiral's Head* in company with her friends; and immediately on their arrival at the tavern, Mr. Hood earnestly counselled her to take her composing draught and go to bed, or the excitement which she had undergone would be very likely to bring back her hysterical fits. The amazonian lady promised to follow this advice: but so soon as the surgeon and his assistant had taken their leave, she sat down to an excellent luncheon with the Marshalls; and heartily did they all laugh at the discomfiture of the bustling Mr. Marlow.

Before we conclude this chapter, we must give a few requisite explanations. The scrap of paper, written by Lady Bess, and sent by the carrier-pigeon, contained the following lines:—

Stations—horses.

Dover—Do something to prove I was at your house this night.

Twenty minutes to two.

The first line was a command merely referring to the two stations of Gravesend and Boughton Hill: the second, by having the word *Dover* prefixed, showed that this portion of the message was intended for the Marshalls: the third indicated the exact time when the bird was despatched. At Gravesend Rebecca Patch made a cross on the billet, to show that the bird had halted at one station: at Boughton Hill Joe Dean did the same thing, as an indication that the second station had been touched at. It, for instance, the bird had reached Boughton Hill without the proof that it had stopped at Gravesend. Joe Dean would have still let it proceed on to Dover: but would have at once despatched a carrier-dove of his own to Gravesend to give the order for the relay-horse that was needed: and if the bird had

reached Dover without the proofs (indicated by the two marks on the scrap of paper) of having stopped at the intermediate stations, then Kate Marshall would have sent the bird back with another note conveying the requisite orders for the relays.

With regard to the secret of the writing, the clue to the reading thereof depended, as a matter of course, upon a preconcerted arrangement and understanding known to all the parties concerned: and the clue to the mystery lay in the possession of the key to a certain transposition of the alphabet. Each day in the year 1844 had its particular initial letter thus definitively settled; and we have seen that on the present occasion the letter L served that purpose. This letter, then, became for the occasion, the *first* in the alphabet. Our meaning can be better conveyed by placing in juxtaposition the proper alphabet and the alphabet according to which Lady Bess's note was written:—

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v
l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z a b c d e f g
w x y z
h i j k

Thus *l* served for *a*, *m* for *b*, *n* for *c*—and so on. We must likewise observe that instead of the capital letter *I*, when expressing the first person, a star (*) was used in the hieroglyphic calligraphy.

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CHAPTER XXI.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

THE lounger through the Opera Colonnades in the Haymarket and Pall Mall can scarcely form a conception of the vast magnitude of the establishment by which he is passing: nor when the house is crowded of an evening, do those present—unless previously initiated—entertain the slightest idea of the multiplicity of the appliances and the complication of the machinery requisite to produce all the scenic effects which they behold upon the stage.

With regard to the size of the establishment, it is enormous, and in addition to the performers, furnishes employment for an almost countless host of persons who are never seen within the sphere of that blaze of light which fills the place when open to the public. The approaches to the vast amphitheatre—the corridors and staircases

—the crush-rooms, where the visitors wait for their carriages when the performance is over—the refreshment-saloon—the enormous theatre itself, capable of containing three thousand persons—and the stage with its ample width and still greater depth—all these compartments of the premises, which are familiar to the visitor, fill up an enormous space. But in addition to those parts of building which are thus well known, there are others which help to swell the magnitude of the edifice. For example, there are the private apartments in which the lessee and other authorities of the place may live entirely if they choose: there are numerous offices where clerks conduct the business-matters of the establishment in as regular and laborious a manner as in any great mercantile firm of the City; and in the precincts of the stage there are the numerous dressing-rooms for the performers, whether belonging to the opera or ballet. The leading characters of either department enjoy the privilege of separate dressing-rooms: but the minor performers dress three or four in a chamber—a due regard to the distinction of the sexes being of course maintained. There is an immense concert-room belonging to the building, and which in itself is larger than many of the minor theatres. Then there is the scene-painters' room—a place of considerable extent and of great height, as may be imagined from the extent of canvass that has to be spread out for the purpose of designing and colouring. There is the room where the theatrical properties are kept, comprising all the costumes and the various articles which have to be introduced on the stage to suit particular performances. Moreover, immense space is required for the mechanism of which we shall almost immediately have to speak; and thus from this mere fleeting and imperfect glances at the principal departments and divisions of the establishment, some idea may be formed of its magnitude.

But at night, when the vast amphitheatre is one blaze of light and crowded with spectators from pit to roof, how few who are then present can form an idea of the mechanical power that is brought to bear upon all those shifting scenes which produce such splendid effects upon the stage. Perhaps it is a beautiful landscape which is thus repre-

sented—with trees, and fields, and water, and houses, and with the clouds above: but all the various portions of painted canvass that enter into the formation of that scenery are moved and put into their place by means of countless ropes and numbers of wheels, levers, and windlasses, so that to the eye of the visitor who is allowed to peep behind those scenes, it appears as if he were on board an immense ship and involved amidst the complications of its rigging. What hosts of carpenters and scene-shifters are likewise employed in the management and execution of all those arrangements which are thus unseen, and the extent of which is little suspected by the brilliant company sitting in front of the foot-lights! Underneath the stage it is apparently one confused and jumbled mass of mechanism, beams, posts, wheels, levers, and all imaginable contrivances for trap-doors, drops, and the numerous other artifices, devices, and ingenious arrangements which often produce such startling effects to the eyes of the audience.

From those dark profundities beneath the stage, high up to the very summit of the building—far above what appears to the spectators to be the top of the stage—a circular iron staircase winds its way, only just wide enough for one individual to thread it at a time; and during the performance constant communications are kept up between the persons above and the persons below. Then, when scenes are to be shifted, all his haste and bustle—yet no confusion. Every one has his allotted task—every one knows what he has to do. But still the brilliant ladies lounging in their boxes, and the fashionable elegants whispering soft nonsense in their ears during the brief intervals of the scenes or the longer one between the acts, little imagine the amount of activity which is prevailing behind the curtain, from the depths under the stage to the heights to which the iron staircase leads, in order that the next scene on which that curtain shall rise may be presented with an accuracy so as to produce the most perfect effect.

Such is the Opera—a little world in itself, and the management of which involves an expense so enormous that it is no wonder lessees require high prices and well-filled houses in order to maintain it. And when we pause to reflect upon the colossal salaries

that are exacted by the Stars of the Song or the Dance—when we count the numbers of musicians, in the orchestra and the hosts of minor characters who appear upon the stage,—remembering that all must be paid certain salaries, be they lesser or greater,—we cannot fail to be struck by the enormity of the whole outlay required, and the commensurate risk that has to be run on the part of the speculative individual who undertakes the management of the Opera.

There is no apartment at this establishment bearing the name of the *Green Room*, as at the great national theatres. Certain noblemen and aristocratic fashionables have the privilege of passing behind the scenes; and in the precincts thereof they lounge and loiter about on the nights of performance, chit-chatting with the ballet-girls, and dispensing their platitudes, their impertinences, or their flippancios to those of the female *artistes* who come in their way. But few of the opera-dancers, when beheld close, display even the shadow of the charms which they appear to possess when viewed from a distance. They are for the most part exceedingly thin: for it must be remembered that they invariably practise for several hours each day. The ballet-master is almost constantly in attendance: and if a visitor, escorted by some official of the establishment, poops into the place any time between eleven in the forenoon and five in the evening, he will see a bevy of those girls dancing, pirouetting, bounding, and practising other saltatory exploits upon the stage, to the notes of a violin. This constant exercise therefore keeps the dancers thin, and renders many of them positively emaciated. Their's is the hardest life—their's is the most wearying toil, of any amongst the theatrical contingents. Then, too, though the Stars of the Ballet are handsomely remunerated, the ordinary dancers are but indifferently paid—the lowest in rank wretchedly enough! When the performance is over, these ill-paid creatures may be seen issuing forth from the hot and feverish atmosphere of the theatre, having just thrown off their gauzy raiment and huddled on their own clothing, too often poor and scant even to wretchedness; and thus from that torrid region they emerge into the chill of the night air, perhaps to face a deluging rain, or at some seasons a nipping frost. Their health

suffers—their constitutions are undermined—and thus with the constant wear and tear of practice, and these liabilities to sudden variations of atmosphere with the accompanying rheums and coughs, whatever personal beauty the ballet-girl may have originally possessed soon wanes fades, and disappears. Some of them too, with sorrow be it said, lead a course of life which is of a nature to aggravate all the above-mentioned evils; and thus, when viewed close, they are very different from what they appear to be when seen from the house, bounding amidst a blaze of light upon the elastic boards of the stage. That bloom which appears to rest so naturally upon their cheeks as they are thus viewed from a distance, looks but a mere daub when beheld close—a thick coat of rouge; yet not always so thick as to prevent the haggard traits of the countenance from appearing through!

But we will not extend this picture to a length intruding upon the current of our tale. Having ere now stated that there is no Green Room at the Opera House in the Haymarket, we may observe that at the time of which we are writing the Concert Room, above mentioned, sometimes served as a lounge for the performers, and likewise for those privileged aristocrats and fashionables who penetrated behind the scenes.

One evening, a week after the incidents related in the preceding chapters, the Concert Room was more than usually crowded by such visitors. The opera performed that night was *I Puritani*; and during an interval between the Acts. Grisi, Lablache, and other eminent *artistes* engaged at the establishment, were gathered in a group conversing together in that Concert Room. Dispersed about, were the other performers in the Opera, and likewise the dancers in attendance upon the ballet. Although we have stated that as a general rule the ballet-girls will not bear a very close inspection—or at least that such near view is likely to produce some feeling of disappointment—yet there are of course exceptions to this rule; and a few beautiful creatures may be seen amongst them. Nor was it otherwise on the night to which we are specially referring; and those who were best-looking, as a matter of course, engrossed the principal share of attention on the part of the privileged loungers from outside. Rest

assured, reader, that Angela Vivaldi was not present in the Concert Room. Though engaged to dance that evening, she remained in her own dressing chamber until the appointed hour came; and then all intruders from before the curtain were compelled to retire. Such was her positive stipulation; and the rule was as rigorously observed as it could possibly be.

But Mademoiselle D'Alembert was very far from being so particular; and she was conspicuous amongst the Stars of the Dance congregated there. Apparellled in a Spanish dress, her fine figure was set off by that costume to the utmost advantage: so that the somewhat luxurious fullness of her shape was well displayed. She was not one who grew thin, much less emaciated, by her avocations: for being a thorough proficient in the dance she practised but little; and having a carriage to convey her to or from the scene of her Terpsichorean displays, and good clothes to muffle herself up in, she ran no chance of impairing her health through colds and coughs. Having a table, too, well supplied with every luxury: and being addicted to gormandizing, she maintained herself in a comfortable condition of plumpness; though at the same time the most punctilious critic of female beauty would not have pronounced her to stout. She possessed magnificent dark hair—a pair of fine bright eyes, with brows—arched brows—and a beautiful set of teeth. Thus, altogether, Emily Archer—or Emile D'Alembert, which was her theatrical pseudonym—was a very handsome and attractive young woman.

At the moment when we thus particularly notice her amidst the throng in the Concert Room on the night in question, she was looking somewhat angry; inasmuch as young lord Saxondale, who had promised to see her there that evening, had not as yet made his appearance. Several other gay gallants had accosted Miss Archer: but she gave them no encouragement to continue discoursing with her. The fact was, she was mightily pleased with her new conquest—knowing him to be the heir to immense estates on attaining his majority, and therefore she was too anxious to retain him in the silken chains of her fascination to risk losing him by a flirtation with other aspirants. Thus, if Miss Archer remained faithful to Lord Saxondale—and meant to do so, as long as it suited her convenience—it was

through no love of him, but because her self-interest was gratified.

Suddenly her countenance brightened up, as she beheld the young nobleman enter the Concert Room; and nodding familiarly to three or four fashionable acquaintances whom he recognised, he passed amidst the throng and speedily joined Miss Emily Archer.

"How late you are to-night!" she said, affecting to pout her lips as she gave him her hand. "I thought you were not coming."

"My dear girl," responded Saxondale, "I was dining with my friend Lord Harold Staunton and a number of other men, and after dinner we had cards—so that really the time slipped away without my noticing it. But when I did see how late it was, I hurried off at once—and here I am. Now pray be so kind as to look as pleasant as you can."

"I will, since you have made an apology," answered Emily, who could judge pretty well from his manner that he had found the means of complying with a certain request she had made in the morning.

"There now! you look quite radiant," said the infatuated Edmund.

"But mind," she immediately rejoined in a low whisper and with an arch smile, "that you do not fall in love with Angela Vivaldi again to-night; for you were desperately enamoured of her before you knew me. Indeed, you told me so."

"My dear Emily, it only required to know you in order to put the Signora Vivaldi altogether out of my head. Besides," added Saxondale, in a very low and mysterious whisper, "my friend Lord Harold Staunton—you know him?"

"Yes—I think I do," replied Miss Emily, appearing to reflect for a few moments: though, in good truth, it was very far from necessary—for she was full well acquainted with that nobleman, as of course he was with her. "Well, what about him?"

"Oh! he intends to pay his court to Angela."

"She is a prude—a veritable prude," observed Emily Archer: but the stillest water is sometimes that which runs the deepest. And now tell me, my dear Edmund, have you thought of the little commission I gave you this morning, when you so kindly insisted upon doing something as a proof of your affection?"

"I have it here," he responded, significantly tapping his waistcoat-pocket. "Ah! I dare say you thought I had gone and lost it all at cards to-night: but you see you are mistaken."

"Then I suppose you called upon old Musters, as I told you?" observed Emily.

"Yes—to be sure: or else how could I have obtained the money? As for getting such a sum in addition to my allowance from old Lord Petersfield or those scurvy fellows Marlow and Malton, it was out of the question—particularly as that blessed mother of mine has been making mischief between me and my guardians. Would you believe it? they want me to go abroad as Unpaid Attaché to an Embassy; or else to go and bury myself down in that dreadful old castle in Lincolnshire."

"But you will not, though?" said Miss Archer, somewhat alarmed lest the young nobleman should be suddenly removed from beyond the sphere of her influence.

"Don't be afraid, my dear Emily," responded Saxondale: "I am not quite such a fool. Besides, since you have given this introduction to the old money-lender, and he is so exceedingly complaisant, I shall feel myself perfectly independent of my guardians and my mother. I got a couple of thousands from old Musters this morning; and here is the thousand," he added again tapping his waistcoat-pocket, "that you require. But shall I give it to you now?"

"No—you are coming home with me presently, I hope," answered Miss Emily, with her most bewitching smile. "I ordered supper to be in readiness, and champagne to be put in ice. Besides, I have got my new carriage—"

"Ah! is it come home?" asked Saxondale. "The coach-builder promised me it should be at Evergreen Villa by noon to-day."

"And he kept his word, my dear Edmund."

"And the two cream-coloured horses, with their splendid new harness?"

"They also were sent down this morning. Oh! I am so glad to have got rid of that sober-looking brougham, which was all that Mr. Walter would allow me. And by the bye," added Emily, "the coachman has got his new livery; so that the equipage altogether is quite charming. And now

that I think of it, my dear Edmund, I have to thank you for the case of champagne which came down to the villa last night, and the new service of plate from the silversmith's in Bond Street."

We will not however prolong our details of this conversation. Enough has been already recorded to show that the shrewd and cunning ballet-dancer had succeeded in enmeshing the foolish young aristocratic pigeon in her toils, and that she intended to pluck him most unmercifully so long as this infatuation on his part should continue.

But turn we now to another part of that Concert Room; and there, in the remotest corner retiring bashfully from the gaze which the lounging gallants insolently flung upon her as they passed—was a young creature of about sixteen, and whose beauty was rather of the pensive and interesting character than of the striking or dazzling description. Indeed, at first sight there was nothing particularly attractive about this young ballet-dancer: it was only when at a second look the observer noticed her more attentively, the impression gradually forced itself upon his mind that he beheld a very pretty and interesting creature. For her's was a beauty the sense of which stole imperceptibly upon one,—a beauty half the charm of which lay in its own retiring modesty. Yet nothing could be sweeter or purer than the look which beamed forth from those mild blue eyes, when she raised them, and before they were bashfully veiled again by their thick dark fringes:—nothing could be more softly melancholy or touchingly plaintive than the expression which grew upon that young girl's countenance, when all her thoughts, being withdrawn from the gay and busy scene around her, were concentrated on some source of affliction that lay deep in her soul. Her figure was slight and delicate, but beautifully symmetrical; and in her very shrinking form the rude and insolent looks that were flung upon her by the privileged loungers as they passed her by, there was an unstudied elegance and a natural grace which made her seem at those moments sweetly captivating in spite of herself.

This young girl was named Henrietta Leyden. She had been a ballet-dancer only during the present season; and her salary was a mere pittance—eight shillings a-week! But wherefore did she thus stand apart

from the rest? Why did she shrink from the libertine looks that were fixed upon her? Because that young girl was still virtuous—still uncontaminated, even in the atmosphere of contamination. Yet, heaven knows she was not virtuous for want of temptation—but because she was superior to it. She had been well brought up: her family had seen better days: but misfortunes had suddenly entered their house, ravaging it like an army; for death had taken away her father at a moment when his affairs required the utmost attention to rescue them from ruin—and thus that ruin had come. As an only resource where-with to earn bread for her mother and a little brother, poor Henrietta had been forced to turn her accomplishment in dancing to the best possible account; and thus was it that she became one of the juniors in the ballet-corps.

Those fashionable loungers who gazed upon her with libertine looks, but who did not stop to speak to her now, had nearly all on former occasions whispered words of temptation in her ear, and had been repulsed. They therefore regarded her as a silly little prude, not good-looking enough to be worth any particular trouble: for it is not the retiring and modest beauty which steals into the souls of such men—it is the dazzling brilliancy or bold effrontery of charms which thrust themselves forward to be admired and courted, that exercise the greatest influence on the passions—for we will not say the hearts—of fashionable rakes and aristocratic libertines.

But presently an old man, at least four or five years past sixty,—yet dressed in the very height of fashion, and made up with all the artifices of the toilet so as to give as youthful an appearance as possible to his lean and shrivelled form—accosted Henrietta Leyden. He wore a wig as punctiliously curled as any that may be seen in a hair-dresser's shop in the Burlington Arcade: the set of false teeth fixed in his mouth, had cost five hundred guineas: his eyebrows were stained with a black dye; and he affected to walk with a jaunty and debonair gait, just as if all the fires of youth were still animating his frame and the vigour of health giving elasticity to his limbs. But this old man was one of the richest nobles of the day; and it would be difficult

throughout the ranks of a profligate aristocracy, to discover one *more* profligate than Lord Everton.

"How is it, pretty Miss Leydon said the old nobleman, smiling as blandly and affably as he could through the agency of his false teeth, "that you are standing thus apart? Every young lady has her friend, or admirer, or gallant, to converse with save yourself?"

"My lord," replied Henrietta, "I do not seek such companionship as that to which your lordship has alluded:—and the blood mantled upon the girl's cheeks so as even to be visible through the rouge that was upon them; for this was not the first time she had been subjected to the persecutions of Lord Everton.

"Come, my dear, you must not be so short and abrupt in your answers to me. I seek to be your friend. Why can't you hold up that pretty face of yours, and let me see you smile?"

"Smile!" ejaculated the girl with an accent of bitterness: then as if vexed at having allowed herself to betray for even an instant the feeling that was dominant in her heart, she turned abruptly away.

"Stop one moment, Miss Leyden! I wish to speak to you," said the old lord. "It is serious—very serious indeed."

Henrietta, surprised at these words, did turn back; and now her deep blue eyes were fixed with a sort of curiosity upon Lord Everton's countenance.

"I wish I could see you happy," he said, affecting a deep sympathy for the young creature. "Look around you—what gaiety is upon every countenance! Observe Emily Archer, for instance—or Mademoiselle D'Alembert, as she chooses to call herself—how she and young Saxondale are laughing together! I am told that she is now under his protection, and it is natural she should be happy."

Henrietta Leyden was again turning away in mingled disappointment and disgust at the words which Lord Everton thus addressed to her when he desired her to stop once more; and she, timid and bashful as she was, and fearful of drawing attention to herself by creating "a scene," shrank back into the corner where she had previously been standing: but at the same time she murmured in a supplicating voice, "My lord, I beseech you to leave me!"

The old nobleman beheld not that look of earnest entreaty which, as she

spoke, she raised to his countenance: he saw only the beautiful blue eyes of the young ballet-girl—and thence his glances wandered to the pearly teeth that were visible between the virginal freshness of the lips, and to the white shoulders and neck which the scant gauzy drapery left bare.

"You know," he said, "that I am very rich, and I can be as liberal as I am wealthy. I told you that I had something very serious to impart—and it is so. The other night you thought, perhaps, I was speaking mere unmeaning phrases, and addressing you in idiot flatteries; and therefore you turned away just as you were turning away a minute ago. But I am serious in offering you a mansion—splendid equipages—gold beyond all counting! I will surround you with luxuries—you shall quit the stage, and become a lady—nay, more, I will even settle upon you an annuity, so that at my death you will continue well off. All this I will do for you, Henrietta Leydon; and I came hither this night for the purpose of making you these proposals."

The young girl actually shivered from head to foot as she felt herself gradually yielding to the influence of these temptations. Wealth was suddenly placed within her reach: the dismal word *poverty* need never ring in her ears again, nor the spectral shade of want rise in its ghastly leanness and lankness before her affrighted view. She thought of the wretched garret from which she had come forth a few hours back to the brilliant scene of the Opera, and to which she must return when her part was played amidst the blaze of light upon the stage—that garret where she had left her revered and idolized mother stretched upon the bed of sickness, destitute of every comfort, wanting even many of the bare necessities of life, and where also her poor little brother whom she loved so fondly and who loved her so affectionately in return, was clothed in rags and had naught save dry bread to eat! Of all this she thought—and it was no wonder if the young girl suddenly found herself sorely tempted. Oh! if that old lord had appeared before her in the light of a generous benefactor, proffering her succour with even the minutest portion of that colossal wealth which he lavished upon profligies and dissipations, but which she could turn to so many useful and noble purposes—If

it were thus as a disinterested friend that he had addressed her, she could have fallen down at his feet—she could have worshipped him—she could have bathed his hand with her tears, or have pressed it, all shrivelled as it was, to her lips! Nay, more—forgetting his ugliness, and utterly losing sight of the loathsome appearance, she could have embraced him as a daughter might fling her arms round the neck of a kind old grandsire! But, alas, it was not in the light of a benefactor that the old nobleman—as old in iniquity as he was in years—stood before her: but it was as a tempter—and though ready and willing to lavish countless showers of gold upon her in return for her virtue yet not a single piece of the glittering metal would be placed in her hand through pure friendship!

The young girl had shivered and shuddered as if she had felt herself standing on the edge of a dizzy precipice, over the brink of which the touch of a feather or the breath of the lightest zephyr would precipitate her; and for a few moments she felt herself falling.

But the feeling was only transient; the golden vision was suddenly put away from her view by the strong hand of her own immaculate virtue; and if for an instant she had thought of succumbing for the sake of her afflicted mother and her poor little brother, it was now the image of that parent and the recollection of that sweet boy which suddenly armed her with all the strength to resist the temptation!

"My lord," she replied, in a calm tone of decision, "you are privileged to obtrude yourself in this place—privileged also to utter what language you choose to the poor ballet-girl: but she also has her privilege—the only one she possesses—which is, to reject your offers with scorn, as I do now."

And having thus spoken, Henrietta Leyden passed abruptly away; and gliding amidst the throng that filled the Concert Room, she hastened to one of the dressing-chambers, where she remained alone with her own thoughts until the bell rang to summon her to that stage where her dance was to be feathery light though her heart was leaden heavy, and her countenance to be wreathed into smiles though inwardly her spirit was weeping the bitterest, bitterest tears!

Contrast for a moment the behaviour of Emily Archer and Henrietta Leyden—the former a Star of the Ballet, with a handsome salary that was in itself sufficient to provide her with luxuries as well as comforts—the latter an obscure novice in the corps, with a wretched pittance that did not allow her even the bare necessities of life: the former plunging into dissipation and vice without an excuse—the latter avoiding temptation though with every excuse to succumb: the former selling her charms for superfluities—the latter preserving her virtue though in want of necessaries! Truly, Henrietta Leyden was an exception to the general rule. Yet, thank God! for the credit of humanity and the honour of the female sex, there are such exceptions: and it is the proudest moment of the author's power when he can illustrate them, as it ought to be the happiest one in the reader's recreation when he can contemplate them.

CHAPTER XXII.

HENRIETTA LEYDEN.

THE Ballet had commenced; and Angela Vivaldi, more brilliant and more beautiful if possible than ever, was received with enthusiastic plaudits. Her's was a style of dancing which combined so much exquisite refinement of modesty and such winning grace, that she appealed far less to the sense than to the sentiment of those who possessed souls capable of being moved by the dancer's more chastening effects. Never with her was it a study to adopt voluptuous attitudes, nor make meretricious displays of her charms. There was a purity of soul shining as it were through her—a halo of innocence and chastity surrounding her—a perfume of virginal freshness filling the atmosphere in which she moved. She danced not to please the libertine, but to chasten him: not to excite the passions, but to absorb them as it were in the more elevated feeling of a poetic refinement.

At first she danced alone: then she was joined by two other leading members of the Ballet; and the three together, personifying the Graces, performed a measure which by its elegance and its tasteful simplicity

enchanted all the spectators. The beauteous Angela, with her long dark hair playing in ringlets upon her ivory shoulders, held a garland of flowers in her right hand—while her two companions made a gauzy scarf float high above their heads. The three threw all the lyrical sweetness of poesy into their performance, so that while their airily bounding and flitting forms displayed every grace for which the dance affords such admirable scope, there was nothing in gesture, movement, attitude, or look, to shock the most punctilious observer, if any such were present. But then Angela's companions caught has it were the chastening spirit which animated herself; and never had they themselves performed with such magical effect.

But when the Signora Vivaldi retired from the stage, and was succeeded by the full corps of the ballet, how different was the dance which took place! Then meretricious looks were thrown around—then voluptuous attitudes were studied—and then, too, was it naught save an appeal to the sensuousness instead of the sense of all the spectators. Unless, perhaps, in the case of Henrietta Leyden: but she, poor girl, played too obscure a part in the mazy and intricate routine of the ballet, either to attract any particular degree of attention to herself or to give effect to the chastity of her own style. Suddenly, in the midst of the dance, so quick and violent a paroxysm of intense feeling seized upon her—all the tenderest emotions surging up as it were to the very lips and to the eyes of the poor girl—that it seemed as if she must burst into tears: and catching the opportunity of being close by the wings she retreated from the stage. To the angry demand of the ballet-master, whom she at once encountered there, she replied in a broken voice that she had been taken with indisposition; and as she was but a mere accessory easy to be dispensed with, and whose absence would not be missed, he said no more. Nor did he trouble himself any farther about the poor girl or her indisposition the next instant after she had disappeared from his view.

The tears had now gushed forth from her eyes, and she sped to the nearest dressing-room, anxious to escape from the notice of those amongst whom she hurriedly passed—performers, carpenters, scene-shifters, and others. In the confusion of her feelings and in her haste to conceal them,

she did not notice that she had opened the door of a chamber which was not her own; and rushing abruptly in, she perceived not her mistake all in a moment she found herself in the presence of Angela Vivaldi. Then, casting through her tears a rapid glance around, the poor girl discovered that she had entered the wrong room.

Starting back, Henrietta began to stammer forth some words of apology: when Angela said, in the kindest voice and with the sweetest manner possible, "You have given no offence: it was a mistake on your part. But heavens! you are weeping. Surely it is not because you are afraid—"

"No, signora," Henrietta hastened to exclaim, "I am not afraid of having offended you: for you have spoken kindly to me," she added, in a lower voice and with a more deliberate tone: "and it is so seldom—so very seldom that any one speaks kindly to me!"

Angela Vivaldi's heart was melted by the poor girl's words and manner, and also by the melancholy look which, with her soft blue eyes, Henrietta bent upon the brilliant *danseuse*; and turning round to her lady's-maid, who was in attendance, Angela motioned her to shut the door, near the threshold of which Henrietta was still lingering.

"Now sit down," continued Signora Vivaldi, taking the girl's hand, and literally compelling her to occupy the chair to which she led her: for though they were both dancers, yet as the reader had seen, the ballet has its aristocracy, and while poor Henrietta was in the lowest plebeian rank of the corps, Signora Vivaldi occupied the highest patrician eminence—and therefore the former felt as timid and bashful in the presence of the latter as a milliner's apprentice when waiting upon a duchess. "Now tell me why you were weeping," resumed Angela Vivaldi: "has something annoyed you? Even now your heart is full, and you are sobbing. Maria," she added, turning to her lady's-maid, "give her a glass of wine—she is unwell."

Maria, who was a good-natured, steady, respectable woman, midway between thirty and forty years of age, hastened to place a decanter of wine and some biscuits upon the table;

then filling a glass, she handed it to Henrietta, saying, "Take this, my poor child—it will do you good."

Miss Leyden raised the glass to her lips, and was about to sip the wine—for she did indeed feel faint and ill: but at that same instant the idea flashed across her that if her poor mother had but the single glass of wine which she now held in her hand, it would cheer her—it would do her good! And as for that plate of cakes how the poor girl would have liked to take some of them home to her little brother! Suddenly bursting forth into a fresh paroxysm of grief, she put the untasted glass down upon the table: and then, unable to prevent herself from giving full vent to the anguish which had now fairly broken down all the last remaining barriers which had hitherto kept it pent up, she covered her face with her two small thin hands and sobbed bitterly.

Angela Vivaldi did not immediately attempt to console the poor girl: she knew that this outpouring of affliction would disburthen her heart of the severity of the woes that weighed upon it. But at length she said, in that soft and gentle voice which makes woman a ministering angel even unto one of her own sex, "Tell me what it is that afflicts you—and perhaps it will be in my power to alleviate your sorrow."

"Oh, signora!" exclaimed Henrietta Leyden, suddenly removing her hands from her countenance and gazing with her tearful eyes upon the eminently beautiful features on which she read an expression of the sincerest sympathy, "it is so hard to be compelled to dance when the soul is filled with anguish. Besides, it seems to be such a dreadful mockery to play one's part in a performance that is intended only for the gay and happy, when the heart is ready to break."

"And is such your case, poor girl?" asked Angela, upon whose long dark lashes the diamond tear-drops were now glittering.

"Alas, yes!" was the mournful reply. "It was in the middle of the ballet that I was seized with such a sudden sensation of indescribable woe, as the contrast was all in a moment forced upon my mind between the brilliant scene spreading out before me and the sorrowful one which I had left at home, and to which I am about to return."

"Now tell me your name, and everything that relates to you," said Angela, in the kindest and most soothing manner.

Henrietta answered the question by giving those few particulars concerning her mother and her brother which we have already lightly sketched forth: then she added, with a sudden outburst of impassioned feeling, "Ah! signora, it is not only cruel to suffer thus, but dreadful to think that through such sufferings the gold of the tempter often prevails! I have resisted hitherto: but heaven alone knows—"

She stopped suddenly short, and cast down her eyes in shame at having even so far given an expression to the dread apprehension that there was a possibility of her ultimately succumbing.

"Miss Leyden," said the eminent *dansense*, taking Henrietta's hands "you must allow me to be of some service to you. But no one need know anything about it; and if you do not wish to continue your present avocation—However," she observed, suddenly checking herself, as she felt that it would be imprudent to promise too much to one who was almost a total stranger to her—for Angela knew little or nothing of the generality of the ballet-dancers: "however, we will talk more upon that subject on a future occasion. Have the kindness to give me your address—there are writing-materials on the table before you—and to-morrow you will receive a visit from some one who may perhaps be inclined to assist you."

With these words Angela Vivaldi rose from the seat which she had taken close to Henrietta; and advancing to a chest of drawers where her purse lay, she took out some money, wrapped it up in a little piece of paper, and then returning towards the table where Henrietta was writing down her address, she bent over her and said whisperingly, "This will suffice, poor girl, for your immediate wants."

Miss Leyden, whose heart was now swelling almost to bursting, but with emotions very far different from those which she had so recently experienced, pressed to her lips the hand that had placed the little packet in her own; while she endeavoured to murmur forth some words expressive of her gratitude—but her utterance was choked, and beyond a few broken syllables she could say nothing.

"Hasten home to your mother, my young friend," said Angela; "and do not be afraid that I shall forget you."

Henrietta went forth from the presence of Signora Vivaldi with feelings which can be better understood than described. It was not so much because the eminent *danseuse* had put money into her hand—for she knew not yet how much the paper contained: but it was because such compassionate sympathy had been shown her—because she had been treated with kindness—and because at parting Angela had called her by the name of "friend." Oh! for the humble and obscure ballet-girl, with eight shillings a-week, to be suddenly admitted to the friendship of the renowned *danseuse* whose path was paved with gold and strewed with flowers! Oh! to have won the sympathy of her whose high and brilliant position she had so often envied! It appeared to be a dream—a vision from which there would be the sad wakening of disappointment.

On hastening to the dressing-room which she and all the interior members of the ballet had in common amongst themselves Henrietta lost no time in putting off her gauzy raiment washing the rouge from her cheeks, and resuming her own apparel. But, ah! how different now did the young girl look! Her countenance was pale—very pale, even to sickness; and yet she seemed far more sweetly interesting in her pallor than when the roseate tint of art was spread upon her cheeks to mock the pensiveness of her beauty. But her attire—how plain, how scant even to meanness, was it! Nevertheless her clothes were as scrupulously neat and clean as their dire poverty would permit them to be. The cotton dress was faded—the shawl was worn threadbare—the ribbons of the cheap strawbonnet showed that they had been long in use. Poor girl, what more could she do for herself upon eight shillings a-week—with an invalid mother, and a little brother of seven years old, too young to earn aught on his own account!

Henrietta had concealed Angela's gift in her bosom, because several other ballet-girls were changing their apparel in the dressing-room at the same time; nor even when beyond the threshold of the Opera House and in the street, did she pause to ascertain to what extent Angela's generosity had gone. Her heart was so full of the new emotions which such unlock'd—for and unusual sympathy had excited,

that she felt they were even too sacred to be disturbed by the selfish and worldly-minded proceeding of counting the contents of the paper; and so she sped on homeward, without enlightening herself upon that point, or even experiencing the wish to do so. It was a luxury, novel and ineffable, for the poor girl to think of the kindness whereof she had been the object, so that the circumstance of the money-gift was for the moment of the least importance in her thoughts.

Let us now turn our attention for a few minutes to the interior of a room, or rather an attic, belonging to a house in one of the confined, dirty, and gloomy-looking courts leading out of Little Pulteney Street, Soho. Although two o'clock in the morning, yet a light burnt in that attic: but it was only a miserable rush-candle, which just alleviated the darkness and shadowed forth the poverty-stricken appearance of the room. The little window had originally possessed six panes of glass, of a very small size: two of these alone remained, and the vacant squares were covered with paper. A crazy bedstead with a flock bed—two chairs—a small table—a washing-stand—and a few cooking utensils, comprised the whole of the furniture of the wretched attic. Yet everything was scrupulously clean.

In the bed lay a female of about forty, and whose pale and emaciated countenance, sunken eyes, and thin wasted arms, denoted the invalid. Indeed, it appeared as if the hand of death were already upon her. She was awake—and with her head supported on one arm, was contemplating the countenance of a pretty but delicate-looking little boy who lay fast asleep by her side. The child, who was about seven years old, had the most beautiful chestnut hair that ever was seen;—curling naturally about his well-shaped little head, it was as soft and silken as that of a girl. The poor mother, as she bent over her sleeping darling, showed by the nervous compression of her lips that she could scarcely subdue an outburst of grief; and unconsciously on her part did two tears drop from her eyes upon the cheek of the child. It was not till she perceived them that she felt that she was weeping; and she kissed away from her boy's face the tears she had thus let fall.

"Poor child!" she thought to herself.

"what is to become of thee? I shall not long remain to watch over you: I feel that death will soon come to claim me as his own! O Almighty God! have mercy upon this poor innocent child, who has done no harm—who is incapable of doing harm! Alas, alas! if it were not impious, I could wish my darling little Charley, that you had never been born. Oh! how strange it is that according as we are rich or poor, do our children prove the objects of pleasure or of pain. Had I the means to make thee happy, poor child, how rejoiced should I be to possess thee; but now that I am steeped to the very lips in poverty, and that within the four narrow walls of this wretched chamber hunger is often our guest, I sorrow that thou, my poor child, was ever born to so much misery! Your sister has to toil for us both,—for thee, helpless little one—and for me, her equally helpless mother! O, my God!" exclaimed Mrs. Leyden aloud, as a terrible idea flashed across her mind, "extend thine all-protecting influence over my poor Henrietta! I shudder when I think of the temptations to which she is exposed,—temptations which her own exalted sense of virtue makes her recoil from, but to which, alas! a prolongation of so much misery may in a moment of despair drive her to succumb. Oh!, how I tremble every time she goes forth to the fulfilment of her arduous duties. I think to myself, 'Thou leavest this abode of poverty pure and chaste, my Henrietta; but is it not to be dreaded that the day may come when you will return with the blush of shame upon your cheeks and not daring to meet the gaze of thy Mother!'"

Overpowered by the thought, the unhappy woman threw herself back upon the bolster—for pillow there was none; and covering her face with her emaciated hands, she sobbed aloud. Little Charles, being disturbed by the sounds of his mother's grief, awoke and began to cry. Throwing his arms about her neck, he said, "Don't be unhappy, dear mamma!"—and in his own pretty childish way he did all he could to console her.

"Now, the very endearments of that child, so far from pouring balm into the heart of the unhappy woman, were like so many daggers plunging down into it: for with irresistible force rushed a thousand harrowing reflections to her mind. Was it not shocking that a child of such a sweet and affectionate disposition should be

doomed to the sad fate of poverty and misery, and perhaps want?—for though the mother and daughter had hitherto managed, even by dire self-privation, to give the poor little fellow enough bread to eat, yet how long might their ability to do so last? Suppose that Henrietta lost her engagement at the Opera, what would become of them? and when the season was over, if she should fail to obtain another engagement, what then were they to do? Oh! all this was more than the poor woman could endure to think of: and yet the terrible questions were incessantly forcing themselves upon her! No wonder, then, that as she now took that dearly-beloved child in her arms and strained him to her bosom, his very endearments and caresses should make her feel all the more actually the anguish and agony of her position, and dread all the more poignantly for his own future destiny. The little fellow sobbed himself off to sleep again upon his mother's breast; and then, as she once more contemplated his sweetly beautiful countenance—all the more beautiful because replete with childhood's innocent expression—and as she lovingly played with his silken chesnut hair, she again found herself giving way to her despondent musings.

"Poor child! passing the greater portion of your days in the sickly atmosphere of this wretched room, perhaps art thou imbibing the seeds of disease and death from that mother who gave thee life! Alas! is it indeed a mortal sickness which has fastened itself upon me? must I die soon? am I sinking and fading away? or is it through want, and privation, and sorrow that I am thus stretched upon this sick-bed? My sweet boy, how cheerfully would I surrender up my life this moment if it would ensure thine happiness and prosperity! Thou, thy poor mother's darling—how rejoiced should I be if I had the means of giving thee toys to play with, and pretty clothes to wear, and an airy wholesome room to sleep in, and good food to eat. But they cheeks are pale, my poor little fellow, for want of proper nourishment and fresh air. Oh! if we had but a cottage in the country, were it ever so humble, that you might frolic about in the green fields and that the colour should come back to your cheeks—But no no—this may not be this never will be! Poverty has laid its hand upon us—penury is our doom—wretchedness our fate. May

God grant, my poor boy, that all these evils blight not the purity of your sweet sister. Oh! let us suffer, all that we do suffer, with resignation—yes, even with cheerfulness—so long as my own Henrietta remains the good and virtuous girl that she is at present. But when I think of the temptations to which she is exposed—the heartless libertines who frequent that place—and the sufferings which she sees her mother and her brother experience, I tremble—Oh! how I tremble, lest when in her despair she stretches out her hand to God, the infamy of man may drop gold into that appealing palm!"

At this moment Mrs. Leyden's ear caught the sound of a light step ascending the stairs,—ascending too more lightly and with a greater elasticity than ever, light and elastic though that step always was; and it was also with a greater precipitation than usual that Henrietta threw open the door and made her appearance. Her cheeks, that were wont to be so pale, were glowing with excitement—her eyes, habitually so mild and soft in their pensive expression, had dancing light in their looks—and her sweet lips were wretched into a sunny smile. The poor mother instantaneously caught some faint reflection of that joyousness which invested her daughter: for it struck her, that the poor girl had received a little increase of salary—perhaps a shilling or two; and such a circumstance would indeed be fraught with hope and bliss for a family that had to count and weigh well the pence that it daily disbursed.

"Oh, my dear mother!" exclaimed Henrietta, flinging her arms about Mrs. Leyden's neck, "such good news! I have found so kind a friend!"

"A friend, my child?" echoed Mrs. Leyden, with a sudden paroxysm of affright: for what friend was a pretty young girl of sixteen, belonging to the ballet, and therefore regarded as a legitimate object for every libertine overture,—what sort of a friend was such a girl likely to find?

"Yes, dear mother—a good and generous friend, who took compassion upon me," continued Henrietta, with rapid and excited utterance: and she perceived not the sudden alarm which had struck with so sickening a sensation to the heart of her mother. "I have money about me—I know not yet how much it is: but let us see."

"Money, child?" murmured Mrs. Leyden, sinking back upon the bolster.

"Yes—look, dear mother!" cried the exultant Henrietta, as she took the little packet from her bosom and opened it. "Heavens! gold! five sovereigns! Oh!"—and the poor girl, overcome by her feelings at finding pounds where she had perhaps only thought of shillings, burst into tears.

"Henrietta!" almost shrieked forth her mother, now springing frantically upon the wretched couch: "answer me as you would reply to your God! That gold—"

"Good heavens, mother!" cried the damsel now all in an instant comprehending what was passing in Mrs. Leyden's mind: "do you think so ill of your daughter? No, no—thank God, it is not so!"

And with a cold shudder at the bare idea—likewise with a cruel revulsion of feeling produced by her parent's dishonouring suspicion—she sank down on her knees at the side of the bed and wept bitterly. Little Charley awakened by these rapid ejaculations on the part of his mother and sister, sat up and began to cry.

"Henrietta—my dearest child," exclaimed the unhappy woman, "if I have wronged you, forgive me—Oh, forgive me!"

"Alas, alas!" cried Henrietta hysterically: "I am virtuous, and pure, and innocent: and yet for all this I obtained not credit even with my own mother!"

"Dearest child, this reproach tortures me almost to madness!"—and Mrs. Leyden wrung her hands bitterly.

"Miserable gold!" exclaimed Henrietta, springing up from her knees with a look of despair: "the want of it produces misery, and the possession of it brings a darker misery still! Mother, you have wronged me—and this from you—O God! I should never have expected it!"

"Sister, dear sister," said poor little Charley, frightened at what was passing; "do not speak so to dear mamma!"

"Oh, my beloved brother!" exclaimed Henrietta, straining the little fellow to her bosom, "but a few minutes back I was dreaming—fondly dreaming, of brighter days for you: but now all is dark—darker than ever! Perish that gold since it has made my very mother suspect me!"—and suddenly relinquishing the fervid clasp in which she had held her brother, Henrietta snatched up the five sovereigns which

she had thrown upon the bed, and was about to dash her hand through the window to fling them forth, when a hollow groan from her mother's lips suddenly made her pause. "Heavens! what have I done? Dear mother, you are fainting!"

"No—I shall be better in a few moments. Give me some water, my dear child."

The gold dropped from Henrietta's hand, as she flew to fill a cup with water and place it to her mother's lips. Then she sprinkled a few drops upon that pale and emaciated countenance, while little Charley sat up in the bed gazing in blank consternation upon what was passing: for the child could not possibly understand the nature of this scene—but the terror of which hushed his crying and made him speechless.

"Dear Henrietta," said Mrs. Leyden, now somewhat recovering, "I have wronged you—I see that I have most fearfully wronged you; and till the last day of my life shall I regret it. But, Oh! it is misery which warps our hearts—misery that fills us with suspicion—misery that changes our very natures—misery that blights all the freshest feelings of confidence—"

"My dear mother, let us say no more upon the subject," interrupted Henrietta—but yet in a voice which showed how deeply shocked her soul had been and how cruel was the wound that her mother's suspicion had inflicted on her heart. "The friend whom heaven has sent us, is Angela Vivaldi, the kindest, the best, the most generous of beings!"

"Henrietta, can you forgive me—can you pardon your poor mother? Oh! that I could recall the incidents of the last few minutes!"

"Forgive you, dear mother? do not speak to me thus!"—and the gentle girl again flung her arms about her parent's neck.

Then little Charley began crying once more; but now it was rather in joy than otherwise, when he beheld his sister and mother embracing.

Henrietta proceeded to inform Mrs. Leyden of everything which had occurred to her that night at the Opera, and with which the reader is already acquainted. Frankly did she explain the overtures made to her by Lord Everton—the feelings which had seized upon her when in the middle of the dance—and then the scene that had ensued in Signora Vivaldi's dressing-

chamber. Mrs. Leyden embraced her daughter again and again: and again and again too did she implore that good girl's forgiveness on account of having even for an instant mistrusted her purity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VISITOR

IT was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon that Henrietta ascended the stairs leading to the attic, having been out to make some purchases. Her step was light, and there was gladness in her heart: but there would have been more elasticity in the former and a purer bliss in the latter, if that distressing scene had not taken place a few hours back with her mother. For though the poor girl had freely and frankly forgiven her parent—and though she resolved to appear to think no more of that occurrence—yet was the wound still bleeding in her heart; for she could not help saying to herself, "My mother suspected me—and therefore she has no confidence in my virtue!"

Yet, when she entered the attic and began to display her purchases upon the table, the disagreeable impression left upon her mind by the incident just referred to temporarily vanished; because she experienced so true and heartfelt a pleasure at beholding the joy which beamed in the eyes of her pretty little brother. From her basket Henrietta took out a variety of provisions and other articles, including many little comforts for her invalid mother; and then she produced a complete new suit of clothes for Charley. Mrs. Leyden, half sitting up in the bed, watched her daughter's proceedings; and when the basket was emptied, she said, "Henrietta, you have bought nothing for yourself?"

"Oh, I require nothing at present!" exclaimed the young girl. "Now, Charley, let me put you on your new things."

Then, with what heartfelt pleasure did Henrietta disappear her brother of his old garments, and substitute the tasteful though modest suit she had brought him in. And he, poor boy, exhibited all that childish delight which is so joyous to contemplate on the part of the young! Then, having finished dressing him, Henrietta took

a comb and arranged his beautiful chesnut hair in a way to set off his sweet but delicate countenance to the utmost advantage.

Scarcely had all this been done, and while Henrietta and Mrs. Leyden were still admiring little Charley's appearance in his new clothes, footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, and a man's voice saying "There, my good woman, you need not come any farther: I shall find my way. The door at the top, you say—the one facing the stairs? There, you need not follow me, I tell you. Oh! I suppose you want something for your trouble? Stop—here's a shilling—and now pray let me find my way alone. Indeed, I must insist upon it."

These words were addressed to the land-lady of the house—on officious, obtrusive, inquisitive kind of person, who, seeing that the visitor was evidently a man of substance, had endeavoured to push her way along with him in order to ascertain what he could possibly want with the Leydens. But he had god rid of her as much by his peremptory manner as by the donation of the shilling; and almost immediately afterwards Mrs. Leyden and her children heard his footsteps halt at their door, at which he immediately knocked.

Henrietta opened it, and found herself in the presence of an old gentleman with a brown scratchwig, a red face, a large double chin, and a short stout figure.

"Your name is Henrietta Leyden, I suppose?" said the gentleman: then catching sight of the invalid woman in bed, he observed in a blunt off-hand manner, "Don't mind me; I come with no hostile intent—it may be otherwise:"—and he unceremoniously walked into the room.

Henrietta shut the door, and at once placed a seat for the visitor's accommodation: for it struck her that this was an emissary from the kind-hearted Angela Vivaldi. Mrs. Leyden, who, the moment the knock sounded at the door, had settled herself in bed so as to be prepared for the presence of any visitor, entertained the same idea; and little Charley stood gazing upon the gentleman with childish wonder as to what he wanted.

"You expected a call from some one this morning?" said that individual addressing himself to Henrietta. "I know all that took place last night between you and Signora Vivaldi, with whom I have the honour to be ac-

quainted; and she told me of your position—also of what she had given you. I suppose a part of the money has gone to dress this little fellow out in these new clothes? Well, he's a pretty little boy. What's your name, sir?"

"Charley Leyden, please sir," responded the child.

"And I suppose you are very fond of your sister?" asked the gentleman.

"Oh! yes, sir—she is so good and kind to me—and she gave me these new clothes just now."

"And parted your hair for you, and made you look smart—oh, my boy?"

For a moment Charley was at a loss to understand whether the gentleman spoke in a scolding manner or not; and he looked up with a somewhat frightened glance towards his sister.

"Oh, I am not angry!" exclaimed the visitor, drawing the boy towards him and smoothing down his hair: "you are a nice little fellow—but you ought to have more colour upon those cheeks. Well, we shall see. Madam," he continued, turning towards Mrs. Leyden, "you are an invalid. Pray, have you been ill long?"

"I have been suffering much for several months past," replied Mrs. Leyden; "and if it were not for that dear sweet girl, I know not what would have become of me and her little brother," she added, the tears trickling down her cheeks.

"How much do you earn a week?" asked the gentleman, somewhat abruptly fixing his eyes on Henrietta.

"Eight shillings, sir," was the reply.

"Well, you had five pounds given you by Signora Vivaldi last night. Let us see what you have done with it?"

"First of all, sir," returned Henrietta, "I paid three weeks' rent, which we had unfortunately fallen in arrear—"

"How much was that?"

"Seven shillings and sixpence, sir. We pay half-a-crown a week of this room—"

"It would be dear at a gift," ejaculated the visitor, whose principal characteristic seemed to be a strange and almost uncouth sort of bluntness. "Well, go on—what did you do next?"

"I paid the chemist, sir, who had been kind enough to give us credit for some little medicines that my mother required. Then I bought some tea and sugar, some sago, and a few other little things that I thought would do my mother good. I also redeemed some linen from the pawn-brokers."

added Henrietta, in a trembling voice and with blushing cheeks.

"Linen? I suppose for your own wear?"

"No, sir—to make my mother more comfortable," answered Henrietta, with a look that showed she was somewhat hurt by the question.

"Well—and then you bought these fine clothes for the little fellow here—eh?"

"Yes, sir; he was almost in rags. The suit he has now on cost fifteen shillings. I know it was a great deal to give in our condition: but, poor child, I could not bear to see him as he was:"—and the tears rolled down Henrietta's pale cheeks.

"Now you have told me all you bought for you mother and the boy—what did you buy for yourself? Come," exclaimed the gentleman, somewhat peremptorily, "show me the new dress or new shawl, whatever it was."

"I can assure you, sir," cried Mrs. Leyden, perceiving that her daughter was distressed by the question, "that this dear girl expended not a single sixpence upon herself—no, not even to the redemption of her Sunday clothing from the pawnbrokers."

"Oh!" muttered the visitor. "Have you many things in pledge?"

"Everything," replied Mrs. Leyden, bursting into tears.

"I don't know much about those sort of things," said the gentleman; "but I believe that the pawnbroker gives you duplicates—does he not? Come, let me see them all."

Mrs. Leyden made an affirmative sign to Henrietta, who forthwith produced from a drawer a considerable quantity of pawnbrokers' tickets, with trembling hands and blushing cheeks she laid upon the table.

"You have not always been poor," said the gentleman, as he examined the duplicates one after another. "Here is one for a ring—another for a watch—another for a pair of earrings: then we have gowns—blankets—sheets—God bless me! what a miscellaneous assortment of things, even down to petticoats and stockings!"

Although both Mrs. Leyden and Henrietta felt in their hearts that the old gentleman did not mean to be cruel, but that on the contrary he probably meant to give them some relief—yet they could not help feeling a little shocked at the apparently blunt and unfeeling manner, amounting almost to coarseness and indelicacy,

with which he spoke of the articles that were pledged, and which might have shown him how bitter had been the need that had reduced them to such straits. But he did not seem to take any notice of the emotions his words and manner thus excited; and having scrutinized the duplicates he gathered them all up in a methodical way, wrapped them in a paper, and thrust them into his capacious breeches-pocket.

"I shall take care of these and look over them again at my leisure," he said: then fixing his eyes upon Henrietta, he asked, "Do you like the stage? and do you want to keep on it?"

She burst into tears, as if the very question were an insult to her pure and delicate feelings.

"I could worship the generous benefactor," cried Mrs. Leyden, "who would enable that dear girl to quit a profession which she abhors, and to watch nothing but a dire necessity could have induced her to have recourse. When we were first reduced to distress, she endeavoured to support us by needle-work; but it was so precarious and so badly paid—"

"Of course it is!" ejaculated the visitor. "Don't you know that in this Christian country which gave twenty millions to emancipate the black slaves in the West Indies, there are swarms and swarms of white slaves for whom this same Christian country would not voluntarily give twenty million pence? But no matter: let us talk of your own affairs. Do you think, ma'am, that you could bear removal from this wretched den to a little better lodging, if such were provided for you?"

Mrs. Leyden, in a few words—but these were uttered in a tone of deepest feeling,—gave the gentleman to understand that she thought and hoped her indisposition had been produced, and indeed was now continued, more by want of proper nourishment and by grief and anxiety than by anything more serious; and while she was speaking Henrietta gazed with mingled hope and suspense upon the visitor's countenance, in order to glean from its expression whether she dared anticipate that such a change could be effected on her mother's behalf as the one he had alluded to.

"Well," he said, with looks that were inscrutable, "we must see what is to be done. I think that you are a very

good girl, Miss Henrietta: for the moment you got money, you did not go and dress yourself out in finery as most young persons of your age would have done,—and besides, you thought of your mother and brother first. I am very well pleased at that. As for the fifteen shillings you spent in embellishing this little fellow here, I can't find it in my heart to blame you for the outlay, although it was rather extravagant: he is a sweet boy, and it's natural to wish to see him look well. I do not mean to say any more at present—but it's very likely you will hear from me again."

When the eccentric visitor had taken his leave, little Charley caught hold of his sister's hand, saying, "I don't like that old gentleman: he seems so cross and ill-tempered, and he made you cry once—"

"Yes, my dear Charley: but you must like him, though," returned Henrietta; "for he is no doubt a very good man. Oh, my dear mother!" exclaimed the young girl, turning towards her parent, "is there not now some beam of hope for us?"

"I think so. Pray God that it is so!" answered Mrs. Leyden.

Henrietta now hastened to prepare some good and nutritious food for her invalid mother: but while she was so doing she experienced a gradual return of that feeling of sadness which had arisen from the distressing scene of the previous night. The thought that she had been suspected by her mother rankled in the poor girl's heart—not with any sentiment of bitterness against that parent whom she forgave from the bottom of her soul; but with a deep sorrow to think that her own conduct had not been sufficient in all its purity to guarantee her against such an injurious suspicion.

Mrs. Leyden, who watched her attentively during her present occupation, observed the natural pensiveness of her countenance gradually deepening into mournfulness: and she divined the cause. But she thought that the best plan under present circumstances was to say nothing more upon the subject. Not that she was above repeating her prayer for forgiveness at her daughter's hand; but because she fancied that the less that was said upon the matter the sooner the impression of it would wear away from the young girl's mind. Besides, if any portion of the promises at which their late visitor had hinted should receive

fulfilment, Mrs. Leyden cheered herself with the hope that in the joyous excitement produced by a change of circumstances, Henrietta would very speedily forget the little incident which was now occupying her thoughts. Nor did Mrs. Leyden fail to perceive something that might even be termed satisfactory in the way that Henrietta had taken the thing to heart: for did it not prove that the young maiden was delicately sensitive in respect to her virtue, and that the least breath of suspicion tarnishing the fair mirror of her reputation was esteemed by her as a misfortune not to be borne?

A more comfortable meal than for many a long day had been partaken of by this family, was presently served up by Henrietta's own hands; and when she saw how her little brother enjoyed himself, and how her mother's spirits were rallying under the genial influences of hope, the poor girl's countenance again brightened up, and she appeared to forget the occurrence which had been troubling her.

Scarcely was the meal over when heavy footsteps were heard ascending the stairs: then there was a loud knock at the chamber-door—and on little Charley, who was now all life and spirits, rushing forward to answer the summons, a man in the garb of an hotel-porter made his appearance laden with packages. The instant Henrietta's eyes embraced those packages at a glance, she recognized the numerous parcels which from time to time, and with almost a breaking heart, she had borne to the pawn-broker's;—and if on those occasions she had wept bitter tears of hopelessness and despair, she now burst into tears again, but with joy, and gratitude, and gladness!

"A gentleman has sent me up with all these things," observed the porter, who was a good-tempered fellow himself and had not failed to comprehend that he had been made, though humbly and partially, the instrument of a good action. "Well, Miss, you had better cry for joy than for sorrow," he went on to say. "But the old gentleman desired me to tell you that you are all to be ready this evening between five and six o'clock as he shall come and fetch you to go to some nicer lodgings."

Henrietta with a heart almost too full to allow her to speak, endeavoured to induce the porter to take some

money: but he declared that he had already been adequately paid—and having deposited the packets upon the table, he took his departure.

"Oh, what a change for us!" murmured Mrs. Leyden, the faintness of an overpowering joy coming over her.

Henrietta hastened to throw her arms round her mother's neck, saying, "Do you think you will be able to get up? Oh, I hope so! for now that you have got all your nice clothes again and, can go forth respectable as you were wont to do—"

"Believe me, my dear child," responded Mrs. Leyden, straining her daughter to her bosom, and then lavishing her caresses upon little Charley who had advanced up to the side of the couch, "I am ten thousand times more gratified for your sake that all this has happened, than for my own. Yes, my dear girl, I feel myself years younger, alike in health and spirits. Oh! it is necessary to drink deeply of the bitter waters of adversity in order to appreciate the sweetness of the returning founts of prosperity."

By the time another hour had elapsed a great change had taken place in the appearance of the mother and daughter. Mrs. Leyden, having risen from her wretched pallet, had apparelled herself in a simple but genteel manner; while Henrietta had exchanged a faded and scanty garb for one which, without the slightest taint of finery, was alike elegant and tasteful. If in her discarded apparel she had seemed sweetly interesting, she now appeared exquisitely beautiful. Upon her cheeks, previously so very pale, there was now a delicate tint of the rose, but which even in its faintness and its delicacy was lovelier far than the bloom which art was wont to shed upon her countenance when she danced at the Opera. The expression of her features was now bashfully charming rather than touchingly plaintive; and there was a mild lustre in the beautiful blue eyes which were half veiled beneath their thick dark fringes. The symmetry of her figure was admirably set off by the genteel and lady-like garb that she had put on; and altogether Henrietta's appearance was so improved by the advantage of dress, that Mrs. Leyden, with all a fond mother's pride, surveyed her with admiring looks.

"How pretty you seem now, sister,"

said little Charley, joy beaming in his eyes. "I am so glad you have got all these nice clothes—and mamma too."

In short the happiness of this little family seemed nearly complete; and Henrietta thought no more—at least for the present—of that incident which had at first so much afflicted her. It was now past three o'clock as Mrs. Leyden perceived by her watch, which was amongst the things so generously redeemed for her from the pawnbroker's, and which she had already wound up.

"I promised to attend the ballet-master to-day at this hour," said Henrietta, suddenly recollecting her engagement. "What shall I do?"

"If our kind friend does not intend you to continue upon the stage," answered Mrs. Leyden, "you need take no farther notice of that engagement."

"But ought I not," asked Henrietta, "to pen a note expressive of gratitude to the generous-hearted Signora Vivaldi? Oh! I will lose no more time in doing this!"

"But you know not where the Signora lives," observed Mrs. Leyden.

"True!" exclaimed the young girl, with a sudden look of disappointment. "Oh! it would be so sweet, and such a relief to my heart's feelings, to be able to pour forth all my joy and gratitude to that excellent being who evidently has made our case known to this benevolent gentleman."

"He will take charge of your letter, my dear girl," said the mother.

"Oh! but a thing that is done at once always has a truer air of sincerity," exclaimed Henrietta, now fully bent, in the enthusiasm of her feelings, upon carrying out her little project. "I will write my note and take it down to the Opera, so that the Signora may have it with the least possible delay. And at the same time I will make my excuses to the ballet-master; so that if by any accident I should have to return to my recent avocations, I may not make an enemy of him."

A shade gradually fell upon Mrs. Leyden's countenance as Henrietta thus notified her intention of revisiting that establishment which the poor mother held in such horror, and to which dire necessity alone had from the very first constrained her to send her child. Henrietta this time observed not that gathering gloom on her mother's features; but enthusiastic in her resolve to testify her fervid gratitude

to Signora Vivaldi, she sat down at the table and penned a letter, the contents of which flowed with as genuine a sincerity from her heart as the tears which she had ere now shed welled forth from the same holy fount of feeling. This pleasing task being accomplished, she put on a single but pretty bonnet and a neat shawl, selected from the things ere now reclaimed from the pawnbrokers; and having kissed her mother and brother, was about to trip with light step away upon her mission of gratitude.

"Would you not like to take little Charley with you?" asked Mrs. Leyden, concealing beneath a smile the sort of gloomy presentiment which had arisen in her mind at this resolve of her daughter to pay a last visit to the Opera.

"Yes, to be sure!" exclaimed the new happy girl: but then the next moment, as a sudden thought struck her, she said, "No, I cannot. I am going to speak to the ballet-master, and must not take any one behind the scenes with me. Now, my sweet Charley, do not look disappointed; because I shall be back soon—and then, you know, we are all going away together to some nicer place."

Having thus affectionately spoken to her brother, and having again kissed him, Henrietta sallied forth. The landlady of the house, with characteristic inquisitiveness, endeavoured to engage her in a gossip as she was passing out of the front door—for the woman was very anxious to know who the old gentleman was that with a sort of enchanter's wand had appeared to bring so much sudden happiness into the previously wretched chamber inhabited by the Leyden family. But Henrietta would not pause to gratify the landlady's curiosity; and turning out of the dark gloomy court, she gained the street.

Upon being left alone with Charley, Mrs. Leyden relapsed suddenly into a mournful mood. Was it that the sudden presence of so much happiness, by unnaturally exciting her spirits, had led to a proportionate reaction—and that her mind, enfeebled by illness, was unable long to endure a joy so great that it engendered a mistrustfulness of itself? No doubt this was the explanation of Mrs. Leyden's feelings; and in such a morbid mood it was also natural that she should entertain misgivings in respect to her daughter's sudden and impulsive re-

visit to the Opera. Dire misfortune had so warped the poor woman's feelings as to render her somewhat suspicious of every circumstance that might occur, and made her invest the commonest incidents with an air of ominous importance. She accordingly began to fear that Henrietta, having no sooner regained the possession of good clothing, was anxious to display her change of circumstances to her acquaintances at the Opera. The reader will no doubt consider it wrong of Mrs. Leyden to judge her daughter thus,—wrong to form such an opinion of the young girl whose self-denial had been exhibited in so many various ways during their period of poverty especially on that very morning when she had purchased comforts for her brother and her mother, but not even necessaries for herself! Mrs. Leyden felt, too, that she was wrong to give way to these fears and suspicions: but she could not help it—she was not mistress of her thoughts—and they gained upon her. She was naturally a good woman; but the best natures are liable to feelings and weakness of this kind—especially when the physical energies have been impaired by sickness, suffering, and calamity.

"An hour passed, and Mrs. Leyden said to herself, "Henrietta ought to return now." Half-an-hour more elapsed—and still she did not come back. Then Mrs. Leyden kept looking at the watch which had that day been restored to her; and this very watch, though affording a proof of returning prosperity, became in another sense a source of pain and anxiety as it indicated the lapse of time during which Henrietta returned not. The incident of the watch affords an illustration of all the circumstances of this world, none of whose pleasures are without pain and none of whose roses are without thorns!

Half-past five o'clock! Henrietta had been absent two hours—and Mrs. Leyden's excitement grew intolerable. She felt very ill again—yet was too nervous to lie down. Little Charley, too young to perceive that his mother was suffering, and too innocent to understand how she could suffer now that she had good clothes and plenty of food again and was going away to a nicer place, as he had been assured,—was amusing himself with the pictures in one of the books

which were amongst the things redeemed from the pawnbrokers.

Presently foot-steps were heard ascending the stairs; and the elderly gentleman of the morning made his appearance.

"Well, ma'am, I am glad to see you are up," he immediately observed. "Ah! my little fellow, looking at a picture-book —eh? But where is your sister?"

"Henrietta has gone to the Opera, sir, to leave a note of thanks for Signora Vivaldi," said Mrs. Leyden, answering the question.

"That's all very well and good," interrupted the old gentleman: "but she might have given it to me."

"That is what I suggested," rejoined Mrs. Leyden: but she would take it herself."

"Then I suppose we must wait for her," said the visitor, depositing himself in a chair. "How long has she been gone?"

"Two hours, sir," returned Mrs. Leyden, endeavouring to banish the expression of uneasiness from her countenance.

"Two hours!" ejaculated the gentleman. "That's rather long. It is now more than half past five," he continued, looking at his watch, "Did not the porter tell you I should be here between five and six?"

"He did. And now let me thank you again and again——"

"Nonsense! I don't want thanks. I suppose your daughter will not be long. Come, my little fellow, you and I will look at these books together till your sister comes back."

Another half-hour passed. Mrs. Leyden was suffering excruciations, which she endeavoured to conceal as well as she was able; and the old gentleman began to grow impatient. Another half-hour—then another—till at length it was seven o'clock. Mrs. Leyden, who had frequently turned aside upon her chair to conceal her tears, now burst into a flood of weeping; and becoming dreadfully excited, declared her conviction that something was wrong. The old gentleman said what he could to soothe her, and volunteered to hasten off to the Opera and see if anything was really the matter. He accordingly sped away; and during his absence Mrs. Leyden became so ill that she was compelled to lie down. Little Charley now saw that something fresh had occurred to make his mother unhappy; and she was not able to reassure him.

In a little more than half-an-hour the old gentleman came back. He wore a gloomy look—and Mrs. Leyden at once saw that he had no satisfactory tidings for her.

"Your daughter, ma'am," he said, "has been to the Opera. She was there a little after four o'clock, but only stayed a few minutes while she delivered her letter and spoke to the ballet-master. She then took her departure—but was joined at the stage door by some gentleman whose name I could not learn, and with whom she went away."

At this intelligence Mrs. Leyden gave a low wail, and fainted. The old gentleman threw water upon her face, while Charley hastened down to summon the landlady. The unhappy mother regained her senses, but showed every symptom of being very dangerously ill. A doctor was sent for: and he declared that it would be impossible to remove her for the present. The idea of transferring the poor lady to another lodging was consequently abandoned for that evening.

The old gentleman remained at the lodging till past nine o'clock, in the hope that Henrietta would return. But the young girl came not—and Mrs. Leyden upbraided herself bitterly at the cause of what she believed to be her daughter's flight.

"I suspected her virtue—I accused her wrongfully!" she exclaimed with wild accents and passionate gestures; "and the dagger which I planted in her heart has rankled there. Oh, heavens! is it possible that she has gone? has she left the mother who dared suspect her innocence? has she said to herself that it were useless to take a pride henceforth in that virtue for which she obtained not credit? Has she, in short, abandoned herself to guilt in a paroxysm of despair?"

The old gentleman sought an explanation of these self-accusings on the part of Mrs. Leyden, and when the unhappy mother told him what had taken place when her daughter brought home the gold she had received from Angela Vivaldi—and how the incident had since dwelt in Henrietta's mind—the old gentleman at first became very thoughtful. But at length he said, "You must tranquillize yourself, Mrs. Leyden; for I do not think from what I have seen and heard of your daughter, she would suffer her galled feelings thus to urge her on to

so desperate a step as accepting libertine proposals. In any case you will not lose a friend in me. I shall come and see you again to-morrow: but as I feel interested in all that concerns you, mind you send and let me know the instant your daughter comes back. For that she will come back, with a satisfactory account of her present absence, I feel confident. Here is my address."

Thus speaking, the old gentleman laid his card upon the table; and having kissed little Charley, who had gone to bed an hour previously, crying bitterly at his sister's absence,—the eccentric benefactor took his departure. He did not however leave the house without placing gold in the landlady's hand, and desiring her to minister in all possible ways to the comfort and well-being of Mrs. Leyden. But, alas! unhappiness had once again entered that humble chamber,—not the unhappiness produced by poverty, for this evil existed there no longer,—but the unhappiness arising from the disappearance of Henrietta and the self-accusings of her invalid mother.

It appeared from the card which the old gentleman had left upon the table, that the name of the poor family's benefactor was Mr. Jonathan Gunthorpe, and that his address was at the *Bell and Crown*, Holborn.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PRECEPTOR AND HIS PUPIL.

THE name of William Deveril has been occasionally mentioned in our pages; and we must now introduce him more particularly to the reader. He was quite a young man; but it was not very easy to fix his exact age to a year or two, because his complexion being rendered somewhat dark by a long residence in a southern clime, together with a certain thoughtfulness of look, possibly made him appear a trifle older than he really was. Thus he might have been a little under twenty: or a little above twenty for with no nicer precision could his age be fixed.

He had dark hair, worn somewhat long, and curling naturally—whiskers which though small increased the manliness of his otherwise youthful

appearance—and fine black eyes, beaming with intelligence when not bent down in the mind's abstraction of thought. He was tall and slender, not merely symmetrically formed, but modelled with an Apollo-like grace and elegance. His features were of the Grecian cast—his upper lip short, with that aristocratic curl which may express disdain where there is false pride, but which is equally indicative of a calm and a manly dignity where there is no overweening hauteur. His teeth were remarkable for their whiteness and evenness; and there was something peculiarly sweet, though by no means effeminate, in his smile. It denoted a kind disposition and a generous heart, which indications of character were amply corroborated by the high and noble forehead that seemed formed to be crowned with nature's own peerless diadem of intelligence.

William Deveril was accustomed to dress in a style which became a perfect gentleman, but without the least pretension to finery—much less of, mawkish dandyism. Nevertheless, a stranger who beheld that elegant young man, of such exquisite masculine beauty, apparelled in the most becoming style, would have been very far from suspecting that he was anything less than a scion of the aristocracy. And yet, as the reader is already aware, William Deveril earned his bread by giving lessons in drawing, music and painting upon ivory. But then he had become quite the rage, so to speak, as a professor of these arts; and teaching only in the best families, he was enabled to turn his talents to a very lucrative advantage.

It was about midday as Mr. Deveril knocked at the door of Lady Macdonald's mansion in Cavendish Square; and to his questions as to whether Lady Florina Staunton was at home, the footman who answered his summons, replied in the affirmative. The young professor was thereupon conducted to a parlour where he found Lady Florina seated alone.

The young patrician damsel had already arranged upon a table the requisite drawing-materials; and it had been with a fluttering heart that she had counted the minutes until William Deveril made his appearance. Now, as he entered the room, she with that command which a well-bred and modest young female is enabled to

exercise over her feelings, received him with that affable courtesy which she was always wont to display towards her young preceptor. Then resuming her seat from which she had risen, she said, "I have done but little, Mr. Deveril, to this picture since you were last here: but I hope to make some progress this morning."

As she thus spoke she bent her head over a piece of ivory, of an oval shape, and about six inches in diameter at its widest part. The subject of the design was a beautiful landscape which the fair pupil was copying from a water-colour drawing made by Deveril himself; and so far as her performance had advanced, it gave promise of being a very tolerable imitation of the original.

"Your ladyship has not touched it, I see, since I was here the day before yesterday," observed Deveril, as he glanced at the ivory: then taking a seat near his beautiful pupil, he added, "But if your ladyship can give me an hour to-day some progress will indeed be made.

"I wish to have it finished Mr. Deveril," answered Florina, "because my aunt is desirous to present it to some one of her acquaintance. I had therefore purposed to beg you to extend the lesson to at least two hours—that is, if it do not interfere with any previous arrangement which you have made.

"And if I had made any, it should cheerfully be put off for your ladyship!" replied Deveril, with a warmth of tone which suddenly made Florina start and the colour rush to her cheeks: for there was something in those accents which touched the tenderest chord that thrilled to her heart's core; for she knew that Deveril loved her, and this was another of those unwitting and almost unconscious proofs of that love which from time to time escaped him.

But how did the innocent and artless Florina know that Deveril loved her? Had he ever declared his passion? No: he had not dared to do so; nor had she ever ventured to encourage him in such daring. But to those who love, the signs and evidences of love in others are as intelligible as a language which though unknown to some, is yet a facile means of interchanging thoughts with those who can speak it. For love has its own peculiar language, which though often ineffable, is nevertheless potent in its

silent eloquence,—a language whose syllables, and words, and sentences are expressed by a thousand little circumstances that pass unnoticed by the common observer, but which are full of meaning to those whose hearts afford the key to the reading of those mysteries. Thus a gesture—a suppressed sigh—a look hurriedly given and has hurriedly withdrawn—the flitting blush upon the cheeks—the thrill which is mutually experienced when the hands accidentally come in contact—the visible quivering of the entire form at such contact—the subdued hushed tone in which words are spoken at one moment, and the suddenly excited warmth with which they are uttered at another, although the words themselves may be merely commonplace,—all these are the signs, and emblems, and soul-waftings of love. But more!—when two beings of kindred dispositions and congenial spirits, and in whose union there appears to be a fitness, marked by nature and designated by heaven—when two such beings meet, although they may give no single one of all those signs of mutual passion, yet is there not such a thing as the soft and mystic trans-fusion of souls, taking place by some unknown and ineffable agency—a blending of the spirits such as no gross passion can know and no common nature experience,—an interchange of silent whisperings from heart to heart,—the whole passing all human understanding?

If the reader can comprehend all this, he will not be surprised that a being so pure and chaste in thought, so stainless and immaculate in soul, so innocent and unsophisticated in all the artifices of the world—so etherealized, in short, not merely above that patrician sphere to which she belonged, but also above humanity itself,—there is no need for wonder, we repeat, that such a being as Florina Staunton should have fathomed the secret of William Deveril's heart.

But let us continue the thread of our narrative. She had started and she had blushed as he spoke with such sudden warmth; and yet it was a warmth intelligible only to herself, and which would have had nothing significantly perceptible for any common observer had others been present in the room. And Deveril saw that she had started and that she had blushed—saw likewise that her suddenly excited emotions had left a thrilling quivering

behind, and that as she took up the camel's-hair pencil in her fair fingers it trembled as if the hand that held it were an aspen-leaf. Then, in the confusion into which his own feelings were suddenly thrown by the incident, he endeavoured to stammer out some excuse, in which attempt his confusion only grew worse confounded.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon—I spoke vehemently—hurriedly—but—but—your ladyship is aware I did not speak disrespectfully—"

"Disrespectfully? Oh, no, Mr. Deveril!" she exclaimed: "I know you are incapable of *that*!"—and as she thus spoke, Florina raised her clear deep blue eyes to her preceptor's countenance.

"I thank your ladyship for that assurance," he said, in the low tremulous tone which indicates feelings proudly moved, and which are almost too full to be restrained,—feelings which while thus threatening to obtain the mastery, appear as if they must burst forth in a gush of passionate and tender avowals to the idol of adoration. "What I meant was that I am at all times ready to devote myself so entirely to your service that every other engagement should be cheerfully put aside."

Florina having again bent her eyes down upon the ivory, was endeavouring to commence laying in some colour: but her hand trembled, and she at once made a serious fault.

"Oh! you have spoilt your picture!" exclaimed Deveril. Give me the brush—the colour must be removed directly."

But in his eagerness to take the brush from her, their hands came completely in contact, so that Florina's fingers let it fall altogether; and rolling over the ivory it made a number of marks altogether spoiling the design.

"A thousand apologies for my precipitation!" said Deveril, again overwhelmed with confusion, and taking all the blame unto himself.

"It was not your fault," murmured Florina, in a soft melting voice; and unconsciously—mechanically—impulsively, she extended her hand as an assurance that she was not offended.

Deveril took that hand—pressed it—found it linger in his own—and retained it in his clasp. Oh! the ineffable bliss of that moment! Then indeed wast here the soft transfusion of spirits warmly blending: then was there an indescribable sense of rapture mutually felt! Deveril was no longer master of

himself; and yet it was not with a gross passion that he was intoxicated, but with the purest and holiest love that he was elevated to the realms of elysian bliss. He raised to his lips the hand that still lingered in his own—he kissed it gently, and yet fervently—and then, as if astounded and amazed by his audacity, he sank on his knees at Florina's feet, exclaiming, "Pardon—pardon me!"

He had suddenly relinquished her hand: but she gave it to him again in a hurried and bewildered manner,—murmuring in a broken voice, "Rise, Mr. Deveril—for heaven's sake, rise! If any one should come in, what would be thought?—I who am betrothed to another!"—and suddenly overpowered by this idea she burst into tears.

"Oh, you weep! you weep!" exclaimed Deveril, starting up from his kneeling posture and resuming his chair by her side. "But those words which you have uttered—they prove—they confirm the wildest hopes—Oh, that this may not be a dream!"

"Mr. Deveril, I am unhappy—very, very unhappy, murmured poor Florina gazing upon him through her tears.

"Leave me, forget this moment of weakness on my part—"

"You bid me leave you?" said Deveril, in a mournful voice and with a reproachful look. "What—leave you at a moment when it appeared as if heaven itself were opening above me?"

"Oh, if I could tell you all I wish to say," exclaimed Florina, with more passionate vehemence than she had ever shown in her life before, "it would relieve my heart! But no—I dare not I dare not! Leave me!"

"And if I leave you thus, are we ever to meet again?" asked Deveril, profoundly afflicted.

Florina hastily wiped away the tears from her eyes, and blushing her looks upon the young man, she was about to put forth all the energies of maiden firmness and tell him that it were indeed better they should part to meet no more, when all that firmness melted rapidly away as she gazed upon the exquisite beauty of Deveril's countenance—a beauty which never had seemed more fascinating to her view than at this moment when every feature expressed love, adoration, sorrow, and despair!

"Mr. Deveril," she said, I cannot give utterance to what I was about to say; for it was an injunction that would have sealed my unhappiness."

"And mine also, if it were to have bidden me leave you," he immediately rejoined, his countenance lighting up with the animation of hope and bliss. "Say, beautiful lady, has not everything which has just taken place gone too far to be recalled?—have not secrets been revealed which may never be consigned back to oblivion?—and have not two hearts lifted the veil from their innermost sanctuaries? Oh, do not tell me that what is done you could wish to be undone? Now—recall not a single gesture, nor a single look. To do so were to prove far more cruel than you are capable of proving: it would have been to lift me on angel-wings high above the common things of earth, merely to plunge me deep down into an abyss of darkness and despair!"

William Deveril had spoken in that tone of mingled rapture, earnestness, hope, and suspense, which was full of love's ineffable but varied music, and can be listened to by no young maiden with impunity: so that even if Florina had been far more solemnly and sacredly pledged by vows of her own to Edmund Saxondale than she was, she would have forgotten all such plight and troth at that instant, because her own feelings were stronger than herself.

"No," she said, murmuringly, as if it were the silvery flow of a crystal streamlet that was wafting soft spirit voices upon its surface, "I wish to recall nothing—I do not now repent of what has just taken place!"

"Oh, then you love me! you love me!" exclaimed Deveril, in a tone of swelling enthusiasm and gushing rapture; and again and again did he press to his lips the fair hand that was now completely abandoned to him. "But, ah! I reflect, Lady Florina!" he said, a cloud suddenly settling upon his countenance: "all the brilliant prospects of your life may be at stake! If you condescend to bestow your hand upon me, you become the bride of the humble and obscure artist—"

"But I become the bride of him whom I can love," observed Florina, in a low soft voice, full of an ineffable sincerity.

"And you will renounce the coronet of Saxondale for me?" asked Deveril, his cheeks glowing with rapture.

"Were it a diadem, I would renounce it for you!" rejoined the patrician maiden.

"Oh! is it possible that such bliss is a reality? can it be otherwise than a

dream?" cried Deveril, once more falling upon his knees at the feet of Lady Florina: then as he gazed up into her countenance, he said with a mingled earnestness and impassioned emotion, "If for my sake you consent to sacrifice all those prospects which the world deems brilliant and dazzling,—if for the love of me, the humble and obscure artist, you renounce that position which society considers so desirable, you lay me under an immensity of obligation which only can be repaid by a love so fond, so tender, and so faithful, that never did poet dream of such a love nor novelist depict it! But is this all that I can give in return for the vastness of the sacrifice which you will make for me? Yes—I can offer you no other riches than the wealth of a heart's devotion—the opulence of feelings that shall have no other aim nor endeavour than to ensure your happiness—the treasure of an enthusiastic adoration of which thine image alone shall ever reign the idol! Such, Florina, is all that I can offer you—all that I can lay at your feet—in return for this love of yours."

"And what more can I ask?" said the maiden, in gentle accents and with tender looks, as she bent down towards her kneeling lover, so that her eyes looked into his own, and her balmy breath fanned his brows that were throbbing with the excitement of ineffable feelings. "You offer me everything calculated to ensure my happiness; and promptings of my heart tell me that if others seek to control my fate by wedding me to splendid misery and coroneted unhappiness, it is a duty I owe unto myself to accept the destiny which a higher power—I mean that of heaven—appears to throw in my way!"

"Oh! every word that you speak, worshipped and adored Florina, convinces me of the depth of your love and assures me of its enduring constancy! This, this is happiness indeed!"—and as Deveril spoke he threw his arm round the snowy neck of the beauteous damsel, and drew down the countenance already so close to his own till their lips met: and as he still knelt at Florina's feet, he thus culled the first kiss of the love which was now so fully revealed.

"Rise, rise," said Florina, with murmuring tremulousness of tone; "rise, William—dearest William!"

"He obeyed her—he rose from his kneeling posture—he again seated

himself by her side—but for some minutes his heart was too-full to allow the utterance of another word. It was a sort of subdued ecstasy—a prolonged sensation of bliss, wherein his soul was steeped: his heart was bathing in a fount of elysian delight. The impression of that pure, chaste kiss was still upon his lips,—the voice which had just addressed him by his Christian name for the first time, was dwelling like a soft strain of delicious music in his ears,—and the image of her on whom he gazed in mute adoration, was reproduced in his heart, never to be effaced! He felt that whatever should betide him in this world, through whatever storms of adversity or tornadoes of misfortune he might be hurried,—to whatever distance circumstances might separate him from the presence of the idolized and adored one,—yet that still the sweets of that kiss would linger on his lips, the music of that voice would continue to float in his ears, and the image of that face of transcending beauty would remain indelibly impressed upon his soul.

On the other hand, while all these thoughts and sensations were exercising their beautific influence upon William Deveril Florina was likewise busied with kindred reflections: for she felt that whatever barriers might spring up in the way of her union with him whom she thus loved, that still her love would never be impaired, but if there were a possibility of its increasing, it would acquire fresh power in the presence of every difficulty. Nor less could she avoid contrasting this handsome and elegant young man with the insipid-looking and self-sufficient youth whom her relations sought to sacrifice her. Indeed, carried away by the current of these reflections, she could not help giving audible utterance to them—thereby breaking a long silence, during which she and her lover had sat gazing in mute rapture upon each other.

“I feel that I have been too docile, too obedient,” she observed, in a low soft voice. “I have listened with even a servility of which I am now ashamed, and with a meekness wherein was absorbed all the proper spirit of a woman, to the representations of my aunt Lady Macdonald and to the injunctions of my brother Lord Harold. I never ought to have given an affirmative reply to the suit of Lord Saxondale! But while I, on the one

hand, was submitting to the control of aunt and a brother, he on the other hand was acting in accordance with the counsel of his mother: for I now understand it all—this alliance was projected and arranged between the two families, in utter disregard of what my own feelings might be! But Oh! I am not to be disposed of in this manner; nor will I suffer all the brightest and choicest flowers of my heart’s spring-time to wither in the sickly atmosphere of society’s conventionalisms, nor be crushed beneath the heel of an aunt’s or a brother’s despotism.”

As Florina thus spoke, her beautiful countenance became flushed with excitement—her nostrils dilated—her eyes flushed brightly—her lips curled with decision—and her bosom swelled proudly. Never had she appeared to Deveril’s view so truly handsome, so transcendently lovely, as at this moment when asserting the spirit of a young damsel who felt that she had been coerced, but who had resolved to emancipate herself from the shackles of domestic tyranny.

The reader may rest assured that little progress was made in the drawing lesson of that day: nevertheless William Deveril remained the full two hours which he had at first been invited to stop. Is it necessary to enter into details as to how this interval was passed? or cannot the reader picture to himself all the tenderness of that scene which followed the mutual confession of love? There were long periods of silence, during which William and Florina sat together, their hands locked, and their spirits blending in the raptured gaze which they fixed upon each other: then there were intervals of soft and tender discourse, during which vows and pledges were renewed over and over again;—and the time flew away so rapidly that the two hours had passed ere the lovers awoke from their dreamy bliss to the consciousness that time was passing at all.

At length Deveril rose to take his departure. Nothing had been settled as to any future course which they were to pursue: they had been too much absorbed in the happiness of the present moment to be able to give serious attention to the circumstances that might arise from Florina’s resolve to renounce the coronet of

Saxondale and bestow her hand upon the young artist. But, as in all such cases, there seemed to be a tacit yet mutually adopted understanding that for the present their love should be concealed from all the world—that it should remain a secret sacredly treasured up in the sanctuaries of their own hearts—and that they should trust to the chapter of accidents to throw up circumstances in their favour. Thus ever is it with those who love in opposition to the wishes of relatives and friends; for there is a timidity in love which condemns the heart to keep it secret and forbids the lips to proclaim it boldly, even though the resolve be deeply taken that this shall be the only love that can lead to marriage.

After exchanging a fond embrace William and Floriana separated,—the former taking his departure from Lady Macdonald's mansion, and the latter remaining alone to enjoy the luxury of a solitude in which she could ponder upon all that had passed.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE SCENE.

WE have seen that William Deveril had called at Lady Macdonald's mansion precisely at midday to give a drawing-lesson to Lady Florina: but we have also seen that it was a lesson in love that was mutually taken, and that two hours had slipped away almost unnoticed by the lovers. It was therefore two o'clock when Mr. Deveril issued from that mansion: and at this hour he ought in pursuance of his engagement to attend at Saxondale House to give lessons to the Hon. Misses Juliana and Constance Farefield. But how could he possibly think of these two ladies when the lovely and beloved Florina filled his heart with her image?

Mechanically however he proceeded towards Park Lane; but as he made his way through the streets, he had no eyes for the ever flowing tide of that human ocean which pours its unceasing floods through the great thoroughfares of the metropolis; nor had he any ears for those multitudinous sounds which indicate the bustle, the activity, and the vital energies of the modern Babylon. All his powers of vision as well as all his faculties of thought were concentrated inwardly—absorbed in the delicious contemplation

of Florina's image which was impressed upon his heart.

In this mood did he reach the vicinage of Saxondale House: but instead of presenting himself there, he entered Hyde Park and roved about for some time, abandoning himself to those delicious reflections which naturally sprang from the scene described in the preceding chapter. At length he recollects his engagement at Saxondale House. He looked at his watch: it was half-past three o'clock. What should he do? It was doubtless too late to give Hon. Misses Farefield their lesson: but would it not appear pre-eminently disrespectful not to call, offer an apology, and ascertain whether it would be their pleasure to take their lesson on the morrow?

Deciding upon this course, William Deveril bent his way to Saxondale House, and was immediately admitted by the hall-porter. He was conducted by a footman up-stairs to the apartment where the two sisters were wont to take their lesson; and he therefore supposed, as he ascended, that they were waiting for him. But on reaching that apartment, instead of perceiving Juliana and Constance there, he found himself in the presence of Lady Saxondale herself.

"You are late, Mr. Deveril," said her ladyship, in a somewhat peculiar tone, so that the young artist's first and most natural thought was that he had offended the haughty patrician lady by his seeming neglect.

"I have to offer your ladyship a thousand apologies," he replied, in a tone and manner which while exceedingly courteous and respectful, had nevertheless nothing servile nor grovelling in them.

"Never mind, Mr. Deveril," said her ladyship. "I am not disposed to be angry with you. My daughters waited a little while; and finding you did not come, they went to take an airing in the carriage. But sit down:"—and she pointed to a chair near the one in which she herself was seated.

"I thank your ladyship," returned Deveril, who still remained standing; "but I will not intrude any longer on your ladyship. Might I ask whether the Hon. Misses Farefield designated an hour for me to come to-morrow?"

"Yes—at two o'clock, if your engagements will permit," answered Lady Saxondale: and still there was something so peculiar in her voice and

look that the young artist knew not what to think, and even felt himself troubled—but so vaguely and undefinably that he could not account for this uneasiness. "Sit down, Mr. Deveril," added Lady Saxondale: "I wish to speak to you."

He accordingly took the chair which she indicated; and she at the same moment drew her own a little closer: then bending forward with an air of mysterious confidence, she said, "Mr. Deveril, I am desirous of having some very serious discourse with you. You will no doubt be surprised—astonished—at what you will hear: but you must listen!"

Lady Saxondale, as she thus spoke, fixed so strange and unfathomable a look upon the young artist that the trouble of his mind increased—he felt embarrassed and confused—a thousand strange ideas instantaneously flitted through his brain but—not one of them settled down there into shape or consistency. He threw a trembling and inquiring look upon Lady Saxondale, and saw that her countenance was flushed—that her eyes were shining with a strange lustre—that her lips were quivering—and that her majestic bust was swelling and falling with great and rapid heavings. Deveril grew almost frightened, and wished to heaven that he were away from her presence and fairly out of the house: but he dared not for courtesy's sake quit her with abruptness.

"Mr. Deveril," resumed Lady Saxondale, in a voice that was tremulously low and strangely deep, "if a lady of high rank—of patrician eminence—should suffer you to know that in spite of all conventionalisms—in spite too of all circumstances which ought to seal her lips on such a subject—aye, and compel her to crush and stifle the feeling itself,—if such a lady, I ask, should suffer you to perceive that you are not indifferent to her, what course would you pursue?"

Deveril was both astounded and alarmed by this singular speech. For an instant he fancied that Lady Saxondale herself was about to make an avowal of love; but instantaneously discarding the idea as ridiculous, he was struck with the conviction that she had somehow or another discovered what had taken place during the few past hours between himself and Florina and that she was thus delicately and hesitatingly opening the matter

to him, so as to remind him of his duty and not deprive her son Lord Saxondale of the maiden whom family arrangements had settled to become the young noble's bride.

"You look astonished—even dismayed, at the words I have just spoken?" resumed Lady Saxondale, with every indication of a heightened emotion; so that her splendid form quivered all over—the colour deepened upon her cheeks—her eyes shot forth stranger fires—her bosom heaved and sank with quicker undulations. "But do not be afraid to speak to me candidly on this subject. Let all differences of rank disappear between us—"

"I am at a loss to understand your ladyship," stammered Deveril, scarcely knowing what he said

"No, no—you comprehend me! you understand me full well!" rejoined Lady Saxondale vehemently. "It is impossible you can be under any misapprehension on the subject to which I am alluding! But wherefore do you gaze upon me in this wild and frightened manner? Is it that I have touched the true chord in your heart?"

Lady Saxondale stopped suddenly short and fixed her eyes with even a deeper earnestness of gaze than before upon William Deveril, as she perceived that the colour came and went rapidly on the delicate duskiness of his handsome countenance: for this last remark of her ladyship had confirmed his suspicion that she was indeed alluding to his love for Lady Florina.

"Does your ladyship intend to overwhelm me with—with—" he was about to say "reproaches"; but the natural manliness of his spirit instantaneously reviving, he regained his self-possession and in a calmer and firmer tone observed, "Whatever your ladyship's object may be, I pray you to be explicit."

"Is it possible that you are so blind?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale impatiently: then in softer accents and with milder manner, she immediately added, "Mr. Deveril, it is not your fault if you have become the object of so much deep and impassioned love. Start not—but listen to me! Though destiny has cast you in a humble sphere, yet may I say without flattery, that you are one of nature's true aristocracy. Handsome in person—yes, handsome even to the winning of a

heart that never loved before—endowed too with all the richest treasures of a fine intellect—possessing elegant manners, and a voice that falls like music on the ear and sinks down with ecstatic feeling to the depths of the soul,—it is not indeed surprising that you should have thus become the object of a passion which could no longer be concealed. Yes—you are the object of that passion—and it has been long cherished, although never avowed until this day!"

William Deveril listened in a sort of stupor of amazement. Every word that Lady Saxondale uttered, seemed to allude more and more forcibly to the affection which he entertained for Florina Staunton, but which had never been made known until *this day*. And yet, while on the one hand he could scarcely doubt that such was the point to which her ladyship's allusions tended, there was nevertheless a strange misgiving in his mind that it were possible for him to interpret her words wrongly, and that everything she was saying might bear another construction. He was confused—he was bewildered: he longed to speak—to question her—to arrive at some certainty on the point; and yet he feared to give utterance to a single word, lest he should be betrayed into mistake or error. His position was most embarrassing—most painful; and Lady Saxondale could not help seeing that it was so.

"William," she said—and every fibre in his frame thrilled with emotion as he heard himself thus addressed a second time this day by his Christian name from woman's lips: for vividly was brought back to his recollection the ecstatic delight he had ere now experienced when that same Christian name was pronounced in the melting music of Florina's own voice,—"William," repeated Lady Saxondale, "tell me, wherefore are you thus moved? why do you listen to me in such deep embarrassment—I might almost say with plain? Is it possible, I once more ask, that you do not comprehend me?"

"No, no," he cried vehemently: "I do not comprehend you. For heaven's sake, explain yourself!"

"Oh! why will you drag from my lips, in the incompetent form of words, those feelings that gush upward from the heart?—for the feeling themselves are full of ardour and passion, but words are cooled by the breath on

which they are wafted. But if I must be thus explicit, understand me then at last!"—and after a moment's pause Lady Saxondale added with strong accentuation, "William Deveril, I love you!"

Although from the instant Lady Saxondale had begun this last speech, the young artist was prepared for the avowal just made, yet when it did fall from the lady's lips—and that so abruptly too—he started, and an ejaculation of dismay escaped him. But even then he doubted whether he could have heard aright, or whether his ears had deceived him; and he continued for two or three moments gazing in wonderment and uncertainty upon Lady Saxondale; so that she, with that obtuseness of perception which even the most keen-witted females, are liable to in the affairs of the heart, fancied that he was overwhelmed by his good fortune in being beloved by a lady of her rank and wealth.

"Yes, William—dearest William," she said, in the tenderest tone, and fixing upon him looks brimful of passion, "I love you—I have loved you for some time—and I could conceal it no longer. You know that the world regards me as a woman whose very pride is a guarantee for her virtue: and solemnly, sincerely do I assure you that never before have I stooped from the loftiness of my pedestal to tell any human being that I loved him! But rest assured that I have struggled long to stifle the feeling which thus urges me towards you; and the struggle has been a painful one! I can now struggle no longer: it is a severer conflict than even my proud nature can endure, or my strong will carry on. I bow—I yield—I, who never bent nor succumbed before!—yes, I bow—I yield, to the influence of love;—and you, William Deveril, are the object thereof!"

She had gone on speaking thus because the young artist was so paralysed by the state of his feelings as to be unable to interrupt, much less stop her. Even though her words sounded in his ears, conveying sense and meaning to his comprehension, he could scarcely put faith in what he thus heard; and although he beheld before him that woman of a grand and magnificent beauty, descending from the pedestal of her patrician pride throwing off the Juno-like stateliness of her demeanour, and melting into all the

winning graces and sensuous fascinations of Venus herself, yet still he could scarcely believe in the reality of the spectacle which he thus beheld. So he stood near the chair from which he had risen, with eyes fixed wonderingly upon her countenance—with lips apart—the very effigy of astonishment and doubt!

"William, what means this singularity of manner on your part?" asked Lady Saxondale, her accents now tremulous with anxiety and misgiving. "Are you not pleased with this avowal of love which I have so frankly made? But do not mistake me! It is not as a husband that I seek you—it is not as a wife that I offer myself. No, no—the world must not know our love! And therefore it is as a mistress that I abandon myself to you!—Yes, this tremendous sacrifice of honour, and virtue, and all that a woman should hold most dear, do I make for the maddening passion, that I experience for you. O William, do you refuse such a love as this? No, you cannot—you will not! But you do not believe that I am serious? Come—let me convince you that I am—let me press you to my bosom!"

The infatuated lady, hurried along by the maddening fury of her passions, extended her superb arms to enfold the young artist in their embrace: but he started suddenly back—and with a strong recoil that savoured even of horror and aversion, cried out, "No, no!"

"What! you scorn, you spurn my love!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, whose pride and vanity would not at the first instant enable her to think that it was really so, although she expressed it in words. "It is impossible! You still think perhaps that I am trifling with you—that I am trying you in order to see that you are a fit preceptor for my daughters? But I take heaven to witness that I am sincere. What? still you stand gazing upon me thus in consternation and alarm? It is impossible, I repeat, that you can refuse my love. Love? it is a burning devouring passion,—a passion that maddens me—a passion that scorches me with consuming flames—else never, never had I suffered its wild torrent thus to hurry me away! Love did I say? William Deveril, it is a mad idolatry, in which I could sacrifice almost everything—yes, even the hope of heaven itself, for your sake. Ah! would you have, then, a proof of this fervid love

of mine? Behold it in the present scene. You know my pride—you know my haughtiness—and you may conceive then how powerful is that love which can thus bend that pride and subdue that haughtiness to the degree that now makes me sue a humble suppliant for your love in return!"

"Lady Saxondale," answered William Deveril, again retreating suddenly as she once more flew forward to clasp him in her arms, "is it possible that you can have thus far forgotten yourself? or is the excuse to be found in a passing madness?"

"Yes, yes—it is madness!" she exclaimed with vehement accents,—"the madness of this love which I feel for you! And I have asked you to love me in return—and you hesitate? Oh, but you *shall* love me—you *must* love me—and love too as I do—as passionately as ardently!"

"Peace, madam!" exclaimed Deveril indignantly. "This scene must not be prolonged another minute."

All on a sudden Lady Saxondale's whole being appeared to change: the crimson hue of excitement vanished from her cheeks, leaving them pale as marble—the sensuous light which had been beaming in her eyes, flamed up into flashing fires—the supplicating attitude of her splendid figures was succeeded by an air of Juno-like wrath, as she drew herself up to the full of her commanding height; and in a voice choked with rage, she said, "Ah! then you scorn my love? you spurn me? you have dared to humiliate Lady Saxondale?"

"Madam," replied Deveril, "if I remain here even during the few brief moments which are occupied by what I am now saying, it is only because I would not wish you to imagine that I shall go hence from your abode to give publicity to a scene as unexpected as it was painful. Your ladyship speaks of being humiliated: but if you feel so, it need only be so long as I am in your presence. No—I will not make a vaunt of the proposals which in a mood of deplorable weakness you have ventured to make to me. Let the veil of oblivion be dropped over what has passed! And now I bid your ladyship farewell."

"Stop—one moment stop!" said Lady Saxondale, in the deep hoarse voice of concentrated passion; and she clutched Deveril violently by the arm, "You must not leave me thus. I feel like a desperate woman, capable of

desperate deeds. You, sir, are the only man I ever loved; and to have this first love of mine thus rejected—thus spurned—No, by heaven it shall not be!”—and in the madness of her rage she stamped her foot violently on the carpet.

Deveril, shocked and horrified at what was taking place, burst from the strong grasp in which Lady Saxondale held him, and was hastening to the door, when she bounded after him, and caught him by the arm again, crying, “Stop—I command you to stop! Beware how you irritate me—I am not mistress of my actions—and if you attempt to escape from me again, ere I have said all that have to say, there will be a struggle, and you know it will be playing a coward’s part to do violence to a woman!”

“Lady Saxondale,” said the young artist, painfully excited and scarcely knowing how to act, “I will remain a few minutes and listen to what you have to say, if you will only tranquillize your feelings: for I really do not wish that you should incur the chance of exposure before your household. At the same time I warn your ladyship not to address me again in language that is derogatory to yourself and insulting to me.”

“Insulting to you, foolish boy?” said Lady Saxondale: and the words came hissing forth on her panting breath, while every feature of her handsome countenance was convulsed with passion—a passion in which the fury of desire was mingled with the rage of disappointment and the deep sense of mortification. “Have you refused my love because there is such disparity in our ages? It is true that there are many years’ difference between us: but am I not handsome? am I not in the proud glory of my beauty? Look at this hair;—is there one line of silver in it? Look at this face;—is there a wrinkle upon it? Look at this form;—has time done aught to mar its symmetry? No, no,” she added with increasing excitement, “I not only love, but I have the consciousness of being loveable. And if my mirror told me false in that respect, think you that the handsomest and proudest peers of England, who when seeking my hand have told me that I was beautiful, have spoken thus in mere idle flattery? Once again, then, William Deveril —”

“No, lady—not again—not even once again!” he cried, now stricken with

the conviction that every moment which he gave up to a prolongation of this scene was a treachery and an insult to that sweet patrician girl who but a few hours previously had breathed a revelation of purest and chastest love in his ear.

“Ah, then your’s is a heart of adamant and will not be moved!” exclaimed Lady Saxondale. “But perhaps you love another?”—and her whole form quivered with rage as the bare idea struck her with an ice-chill, smiting her proud heart as if it would rend it in twain.

“Love another?” echoed the young artist mechanically: for again he trembled lest his secret should be surprised.

“Yes—love another!” promptly rejoined Lady Saxondale. “I said so—and I see that it is the case. Oh! that tell-tale look of your’s reveals the secret! Then I have a rival? Ah! rivalry encourages bad passions—it excites vengeance—and by the heaven above us, William Deveril, if my love be spurned for that of any puling sentimental girl, the revenge that I will wreak shall be terrible!”

“Good heavens, Lady Saxondale!” exclaimed the young artist, thinking of Florina; “you know not what you say!”

“But I have told you what I will do,” responded the infuriate woman—for infuriate she now really was. “Beware how you continue to spurn my love! Say but one kind word, and I will forgive all that has passed——”

“Madam, I can bear this no longer,” cried Deveril, once more breaking away from her.

“Stop!” she exclaimed, a third time catching him by the arm, and with such power too that he could not have escaped without exerting more violence than his generous nature would permit him to do towards a female: “I have but a single word now to say. Give me your love, William, and I will worship you: persist in refusing me, and I become your bitterest enemy!”

Having thus spoken, with flashing eyes, pale countenance, quivering lips, and trembling form, she suddenly released him of her own accord—and he found himself free.

“Lady Saxondale,” he answered, “when this tempest of passion has subsided, you will be sorry for what has passed.”

“Sorry? No,” she cried, now draw-

ing herself up once more with sovereign hauteur, so that her majestic beauty seemed terrible in this storm of rage and indignation: "that word is not one which can be applied to Lady Saxondale. Instead of experiencing sorrow, I shall look for vengeance. If your mind be made up, mine is also. I could have sacrificed everything to enjoy your love; but I cannot endure to be humiliated by this rejection of my own. Much therefore as I could have loved you, I am prepared to hate you. Which is to be the alternative?"

"Madam," answered Deveril, "this scene has already lasted much too long, and your conduct towards me has passed from indelicacy to insult."

"Begone, then, sir!" she exclaimed, the fires of all possible human passions flashing from her eyes. "I hate you—and I will be revenged!"

William Deveril bowed coldly and quitted the room. In a couple of minutes he crossed the threshold of Saxondale House, and returned once more into Hyde Park to compose the feelings that had been so much excited by the strange and painful ordeal through which she had just passed.

It appeared as if he had just wakened up from a dream the influence of which pursued him even when he was awake. Was it possible that the proud, the dignified, the haughty Lady Saxondale had so far forgotten her wonted self-possession as to expose herself in such a manner? But by a natural transition of ideas, the young artist was led to contrast the sensuous fervour and immodest passion of that lady with the chaste love and delicate affection of the beauteous Florina. Then, still pursuing the thread of his reflections, he could not help trembling at the satanic threats of vengeance which Lady Saxondale had hurled at his head,—and not at his head alone, but at that of whomsoever she might detect in being what she chose to regard as a rival. Deveril saw that she was a desperate and dangerous woman—a woman whom her disappointed passion had rendered thus desperate, and who was likely to prove all the more dangerous because she possessed the strongest energies, which she would not fail to exercise in the pursuit of any object she was anxious to attain.

But what was he to do? Should he confidentially impart to Florina's ear everything that had occurred and,

thus put the young maiden upon her guard in case Lady Saxondale should by any accident discover that the object of his love was none other than the same being who had been selected to become her own son's bride? No—the honourable and upright mind of Deveril recoiled from the bare idea of shocking the pure and chaste Florina by the tale of her ladyship's depravity; and he therefore came to the resolve to observe the strictest secrecy in respect to all that had just taken place.

It was now five o'clock; and Deveril, quitting Hyde Park, bent his way to a lodging which he had in Pall Mall. Not that he habitually resided there; for he had another place of residence in one of the suburbs of London. But this lodging, consisting of three apartments, served as the place where he received letters and visits in respect to the profession he exercised. One of the rooms was fitted up as a studio, where he gave lessons to those who preferred to visit him there: another room was used as a parlour; and a third as a bed-chamber, in case it suited him to sleep at his lodgings.

On returning to Pall Mail he found two or three persons waiting to see him on matters of business; and when they had taken their departure he ordered some dinner to be served up. Little appetite however had the young artist for the food thus placed upon the table: his thoughts were too much absorbed—or rather too pleasantly and painfully divided between the two scenes which had marked this memorable day. It was not till past nine o'clock that he quitted his lodging; and the evening being exceedingly beautiful, he determined to walk to his suburban residence—for he felt that exercise and fresh air would soothe the excitement of his thoughts.

It was ten o'clock as William Deveril entered the Regent's Park, across which his path lay in the direction of a splendid mansion somewhat isolated from the rest of the superb residences which abound in that district. The evening was warm—some of the casements of that mansion were open—and the swelling tide of music flowed forth to his ear. That music was accompanied by several sweet female voices; and so exquisitely did they sing that the young artist, as passionately fond of music as he was of drawing, stood still to listen. He was enabled to approach to within half-a-

dozen yards of the fence bounding the garden in which the mansion stood; and it was from the open casement of a room on the first floor that the delicious strains of vocal and instrumental harmony were wafted forth. This casement was the side-window of a drawing-room whose front, with a range of several windows, looked in another direction upon an ampler spread of grounds; and the side-window to which we have alluded, opened on a balcony towards which the luxuriant clematis and jasmine, mingling with roses, crept up against the wall.

As William Deveril stood listening to the music, he recollects that Florina had mentioned to him during the two hours they had passed together that day, that she was going to a party with her aunt Lady Macdonald to the house of some friends in the Regent's Park that evening; and as the young artist stood gazing up at the open casement, the crimson draperies of which gave a roseate hue to the light shining forth from the interior of the room, he thought to himself, "Perhaps it is here that my beloved Florina is now gracing the brilliant assemblage with her presence? Ah! was it some instinctive feeling of this kind which made me prefer walking home to-night—which made me take this exact path—and which now caused me to halt here close by this stately mansion?"

While he was thus musing to himself, the harmony had ceased—the soft sounds of the music and the equally delicious voices no longer sent forth their fluid notes to the starlit air; and Deveril was about to pursue his way, scarcely able to repress a sigh as he thought that if Florina were indeed there, some aristocratic coxcomb perchance was privileged to lead her through the mazes of the dance, while he who possessed her love was wandering round the exterior of that luxuriant mansion!

At the very moment he was turning away, the crimson drapery was drawn aside, and a lady appeared upon the balcony, as if to escape for a few moments from the stifling heat within and breathe the fresher and purer air of the night. But that lady was Florina! Yes Florina, elegantly dressed—looking radiantly beautiful in her ball-room toilet—Florina, the idol of the young artist's worship!

An ejaculation of joy and delight burst from Deveril's lips. Florina started and was about to retreat from the balcony; but Deveril breathed her name in a soft voice, yet just loud enough for her to hear. And she did hear it—and by the light which shone through the crimson draperies the enraptured Deveril could perceive that the young maiden's countenance became suddenly animated with ineffable pleasure as she recognized him. But it was dangerous to attempt any communication under circumstances where notice might be attracted; and so the interchange of whatever the lovers might have to say was limited to signs. Florina waved her snowy handkerchief to the young artist: and he responding in a similar manner to that mute but recognized signal of love, passed lingeringly away.

He saw Florina push aside the draperies again and disappear behind them: then rejoicing that he had thus caught a glimpse of his adored one, though only for such a brief passing instant, he sped onward with a lighter heart to his own residence, which was at no very great distance.

But as William Deveril entered the hall of a beautiful little villa which he thus occupied in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park, a charming creature of angelic beauty came forth from the parlour to welcome him, and even to chide him affectionately for being so late. Who was this beautiful creature that thus showed herself so anxious for his return, and whom he embraced so fondly as he made some excuse for his lateness? Ah! from this mystery we cannot at present draw the veil—even though it were to relieve the reader from uncertainty as to whether William Deveril had that day pledged an undivided love to Florina Staunton.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FABRICATION.

NOTHING could exceed the rage and disappointment of Lady Saxondale at the rebuff she had experienced from William Deveril. We must inform the reader that from the very first moment he commenced giving lessons to the Miss Farefields, at Saxondale House, several months back, her ladyship had conceived a strange and

irresistible attachment towards that handsome young man. At the beginning Lady Saxondale had endeavoured to put away this feeling, with as much calm confidence that she would succeed in doing so as if she were divesting herself of a garment which though fitting somewhat tight she had no doubt of being able to lay aside: but insensibly that attachment grew upon her; and though she was long ere she would admit this circumstance to herself, yet she could not help at last opening her eyes deliberately to the fact that she really loved William Deveril.

It was perfectly true that Lady Saxondale struggled long and painfully against this growing passion: true also that it acquired a power greater than her own faculty of resistance. We may likewise observe that she had spoken with equal truth when informing Deveril that she had never loved before. The reader is well aware that she had not married old Lord Saxondale for love; and that though she had been true and faithful to him—had treated him with kindness—and had therefore made him a good wife, she had never experienced for him any sentiment beyond those of friendship and gratitude. At his death, though left a young, beautiful, and rich widow, she had never thought of changing her condition—simply because out of the many offers which she received, not one was made by any individual of a rank so much superior to her own as to make her wish to aspire to it. As for love, she encountered no one capable of inspiring her with that sentiment. Thus remaining single, she had pursued only one idea—and this was her ambition. She looked upon herself with pride and satisfaction as having been the means of perpetuating the race of Saxondale in a direct line from her husband, and in having rescued the coronet and estates from the grasp of a profligate and unprincipled man in the person of Ralph Farefield. Her ambition had therefore been from the time of her husband's death, to rear Edmund Saxondale—to watch over him with the most zealous care—and to cherish him as the only prop upon which the proud title of Saxondale—now rested. For there was no other direct male heir to that title known to exist; and if Edmund died, the title would become extinct and the estates would devolve to a very distant relative owning a ducal rank, and in which the title of Saxondale would conse-

quently be merged and lost. We will not now pause to describe all Lady Saxondale had suffered on perceiving the gradual development of Edmund's evil qualities as he grew up: but we will content ourselves with observing that if she could not love him, she nevertheless cherished him as the only hope of perpetuating the family into which she had married and of which she was so proud.

This was Lady Saxondale's ambition! The same explanations may likewise account for her apparently premature anxiety to make such matrimonial arrangements on behalf of Edmund, as would provide him with a wife the moment he should come of age. Hence the selection of Lady Florina,—a highborn though portionless damsel, whose relations and friends had been too willing to assent to her prospective sacrifice to the sickly, ill-conditioned, and evil-minded Lord Saxondale. It was now the aim of her ladyship's ambition to see Edmund married and behold male issue springing from the union, so that she might be assured of the perpetuation of the race of Saxondale. With this ambition constituting as it were the aim of her existence, it was not likely that such a woman would be easily accessible to the more tender sentiment of love. She was too worldly-minded to be thus sensitive. But had she not passions? Yes: but she had also the pride that enabled her to control them. She had not remained virtuous for the love of virtue: but because she was too prudent and too cautious to endanger her proud position in the world. She had not remained chaste through any genuine sentiment of feminine purity: but because she did not choose to risk the consequences of an intrigue. Thus, when she had found her passions rebelling, she had subdued them; and when tempted by the overtures of the gallant and the dissipated in the world of fashion, she had risen superior to such temptations—not because she possessed a virtue that recoiled from them, but because she was too proud to compromise herself by succumbing to them.

Such had been the history of Lady Saxondale's life from the period of her husband's death until that when she met William Deveril. For nineteen years had she remained inaccessible

to love or to temptation; and now she not only experienced love, but invited temptation by becoming herself the temptress! Severely and painfully, we repeat, had she struggled against this passion which she felt for Deveril: but at length she found that it was consuming her. She had endeavoured to avoid meeting him when he came to the house to give lessons to her daughters; but an irresistible impulse would urge her to the room where she might see him. She had struggled to banish his image from her mind: as vainly might she have essayed to roll back with her hand the mighty volume of water which the Thames pours into the sea at the time of its ebb. The strength of her mind gradually gave way in this one respect: namely, the irresistible passion she experienced for Deveril. She felt at last that she must avow this love of her's to him—if such a passion deserved the name of *love* at all! Not for a moment did she anticipate a repulse. On the contrary, naturally judging from what she constantly beheld passing around her in the great world, she had expected that the humble artist would rejoice at being invited to become the paramour of a lady of rank and riches.

Great, then, was her rage—infinate her disappointment—and cruel her sense of humiliation, at the rebuff she had experienced. That it was through any purely virtuous feeling on William Deveril's part, she could scarcely imagine: but she believed it to be because he loved another, and was so infatuated with this love, that unlike the young men of the aristocratic world, he would have considered it a crime to prove unfaithful to it. Whosoever therefore the subject of this love might be, Lady Saxondale was fully prepared to regard and to treat her as a rival; and thus was this woman, naturally so proud, so strong-minded, and so dignified in her conduct, ready to descend to the meanness of jealousy, the paltriness of envy, and the pettiness of revenge, in a matter where after all she herself had sustained no substantial nor real injury. But where a woman's passion is concerned, her whole nature becomes warped according to circumstances and influences.

Ungenerous herself in the course which she was thus prepared to pursue, Lady Saxondale could not help fancying that Deveril was equally likely to take an ungenerous advantage of the scene which had placed her in his power. In short she

believed that he was likely, in consequence of her threats, to spread the story of her overtures and his refusal. At all events, she argued, if he did not do so at once he would hereafter when he found that she had given utterance to no idle threats but was pursuing him and her rival whoever she might be, with her implacable resentment. Therefore she resolved to be beforehand with him in all respects, and by telling the story herself, put upon it the complexion that would suit her own interests, and throw complete discredit on any counter-statement he might hereafter make.

So soon as William Deveril had parted from Lady Saxondale in the manner described in the previous chapter, she promptly composed her feelings; and ringing the bell, inquired whether her daughters had returned from their ride in the carriage. She was answered in the negative; and she therefore waited patiently till they came back. On their arrival the young ladies hearing that their mother had inquired for them, hastened to put off their bonnets and shawls, and then proceeded to the drawing-room where her ladyship was now seated.

"My dear girls," she said in a far more caressing and lively manner than she was wont to adopt towards them, especially in respect to the eldest, Juliana,—"you will never conjecture how singular a scene has been taking place during your absence."

"At all events, my dear mother," answered Constance, "it was of no very serious character; for you are gay over it: and therefore your words have caused me little uneasiness but much curiosity."

"The scene was too ludicrous to be serious," continued Lady Saxondale. "What will you think when I tell you that I have had a declaration of love and an offer of marriage?"

"What! you, mother?" exclaimed Juliana. "From some old nobleman, I suppose?"

"The remark is scarcely respectful, Miss," returned Lady Saxondale, now suddenly recovering her wonted dignity, blended with *hauteur*: for I presume you intended me to understand that only an old nobleman would be likely to seek my hand in marriage."

"Well, tell us this adventure of yours then," said Juliana, not in the

most respectful tone: for the reader has already seen that this young lady was by no means the pattern of a dutiful daughter.

"Yes—tell us what has happened, my dear mother?" asked Constance, who was far more affectionate and docile to her parent.

"It is perfectly true," continued Lady Saxondale, addressing herself more to Constance than to Juliana, "that I have received an offer; but I think when I tell you from whom it came, you will say that I have even less reason to be proud of the proposal than if it had been made by some old nobleman such as Juliana has referred to."

"Who, then, was it?" inquired Constance.

"Your preceptor, Mr. Deveril! responded Lady Saxondale.

An ejaculation of the most unfeigned surprise burst from the lips both of Juliana and Constance.

"It is really the case," continued their mother. "You know that you waited for him some little time this afternoon; and as he did not make his appearance you went out. But you left a message that if he called he was to be asked to come to-morrow. Now as I always regarded him as a very civil, well-behaved, nice young man, I did not choose to mortify him by leaving that message to be delivered by the servants: so I allowed him to be shown up when he came; and having received his apology for the lateness of his arrival, I gave your message. I don't know if I spoke in a more affable tone than usual: but certain it is that he sat down and began conversing in a way which I considered to be somewhat familiar. I showed a little impatience at this; when he suddenly entered upon the most extravagant declarations—I scarcely know how he began them but I recollect that I was so taken with astonishment that I allowed him to proceed uninterruptedly for sometime. To be brief, he flung himself at my feet—gave utterance to a thousand ridiculous things borrowed from the rhapsodies which lovers are made to utter in novels and romances—brought me to have pity on him—and vowed if I did not, he should kill himself in despair."

"Is this possible?" asked Juliana, eyeing her mother with something like doubt and suspicion in her looks.

"Good heavens, what insolence!" cried the younger daughter, who on the other hand implicitly believed every word her ladyship uttered.

"Insolence indeed!" echoed Lady Saxondale, not appearing to observe the manner in which Juliana surveyed her: "and yet I can scarcely call insolence, because it was such pure unmitigated folly. However, I sent him away from my presence, and ordered him never to come to the house again."

"I am surprised at Mr. Deveril," said Constance. "I always thought he was a unassuming, well-behaved, and discreet young man,—a very superior young man indeed—quite a gentleman—"

"And utterly incapable of such egregious folly," added Juliana. "At least, she immediately said, observing that Lady Saxondale fixed her eyes sternly upon her, "he is the last man in existence that I should have thought likely to commit himself so absurdly. The only excuse to be found for him is that it was a transient touch of insanity."

"Perhaps so," observed Lady Saxondale.

She then continued to discourse upon the subject with her two daughters a little longer; after which she retired to her own chamber to dress for dinner. But she had now a new cause for spite and vexation, she having seen full well that she was not believed by her eldest daughter.

"Well, Constance," said this young lady to her sister, the moment they were alone together, "what think you of the tale that has just been told us?"

"That Mr. Deveril's conduct was most extraordinary," replied Constance not perceiving the real drift of her sister's question.

"And so it would have been if everything took place exactly as our mother has chosen to represent it," observed Juliana.

"What do you mean?" asked Constance, in astonishment.

"I mean that there is something more in all this than her ladyship has chosen to tell us. Is it likely—is it natural, that a young man like Mr. Deveril would fall so desperately in love with a woman of our mother's age?"

"Not so very old," interrupted Constance: "only just forty—and you must admit that mamma is superbly handsome."

"Granted! But if she is forty, Mr. Deveril is not more than twenty," re-

joined Juliana; "and it is not likely, I repeat, that he should fall over head and ears in love with a woman double his age: for it could only be in the madness and intoxication of such love that he would have ventured to demand our mother's hand in marriage. In plain terms, Constance, I do not believe the story; and we will find out something more about it ere long."

"But why should mamma tell so wicked a falsehood?" asked the younger sister, reproachfully.

"Oh! why, why, why—you always ask why to everything!" exclaimed Juliana, petulantly. "Of course one may see things or suspect things, and yet not always know the reason why. How is it that our mother is so desperately frightened of that old wretch Mabel, whom I hate as cordially as possible? How is it, again, that our mother gave an audience in such a hurry to that old woman the other night that I told you about—"

At this moment a lady's-maid entered to intimate that it was time to dress for dinner; and the colloquy between the two sisters was accordingly cut short.

Little did Lady Saxondale sleep during the night that followed this day of her discomfiture and defeat in respect to William Deveril. She lay tossing upon her downy couch as if it were the hardest and most uncomfortable mattress that ever belonged to a pauper's garret. Or we might even go farther and say that many a poor creature that night slept a sweater sleep upon straw than the great patrician lady was enabled to woo to her eyes though lying in that sumptuous bed. Her heart felt as if scorpions were tearing it: for though she had declared that she could hate Deveril as keenly as she had loved him—and though she was even meditating revenge—yet was she still devoured by a consuming passion for that splendidly handsome youngman. And she was tortured, too, with jealousy on account of the unknown rival to whom she felt assured his heart was devoted, and whom she longed to punish!

When morning dawned Lady Saxondale arose from the sumptuous couch where she had only been enabled to snatch a few hours of troubled slumber—a slumber too which was haunted with feverish dreams. She looked at herself in the glass; and perceiving that she was pale and somewhat careworn, she stamped her foot

impatiently, muttering to herself, "New cares, new sources of annoyance and vexation, arising up around me! This must not be."

And yet she did not put a stop to any of these self-created sources of vexation by at once abandoning her projects of vengeance in respect to William Deveril. No: the strong-minded woman was now enslaved by her passions—those passions which for so many long years she had dominated as an empress-tyrant keeps her foot upon the neck of a rebellious people.

It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon that Lady Saxondale's carriage stopped at the house of Lady Macdonald in Cavendish Square: and as she ascended towards the drawing-room, she settled her countenance in such a manner that it seemed to wear a look as if a sense of some ludicrous yet disagreeable scene were lingering in the mind. Lady Macdonald and Florina were seated together in the drawing-room when Lady Saxondale was announced; and they both at once observed the singular look which her ladyship's features thus wore.

"Has anything unpleasant occurred, my dear friend?" asked Lady Macdonald when the usual greetings and complimentary inquiries were exchanged.

"Unpleasant?" echoed Lady Saxondale, as if surprised that she should be thus questioned. "Oh! I suppose that my looks must have reflected somewhat of the topic I was revolving in my mind as I rode hither. Well, I did not mean to tell you—but after all, I do not know why I should keep it secret:"—and her ladyship now laughed with every appearance of a genuine merriment.

"At all events it is nothing seriously unpleasant," said Lady Macdonald.

"Rather ludicrous and amusing than unpleasant," responded Lady Saxondale. "And yet it is annoying too—because," she added with dignity, "I flatter myself that there could not possibly be anything in my manner, much less in my conduct, to give the slightest encouragement—

"My dear friend, you are speaking in enigmas," said Lady Macdonald, as Lady Saxondale paused. Neither Florina nor I can understand to what you are alluding. And yet in the sphere in which we move, people do seem to be growing mysterious and incomprehensible. Here's my niece, who has

been so abstracted and thoughtful all the morning——”

“By the bye, my dear Florina,” exclaimed Lady Saxondale, as if suddenly reminded of something by the aunt’s allusion to the young lady, “now that I think of it, you receive lessons from a certain Mr. William Deveril—do you not?”

The sudden appearance of a ghost would not have produced a more startling effect upon the lovely Florina than this question so abruptly and unexpectedly put. She turned red and pale in rapid transitions—half sprang from her seat—and then surveyed Lady Saxondale in a sort of stupor or amazement.

“Why, what is the matter with you, Flo?” asked her ladyship, at first utterly at a loss to comprehend the meaning of this emotion which her words had excited on the part of the young lady; then all in an instant a suspicion of the truth flashed to her mind—for the eyes of jealousy are keen and sharp as needles.

“You changed the conversation so abruptly, my dear Lady Saxondale,” answered Florina, slowly recovering herself and endeavouring to smile, though the attempt was not very successful, “that you quite startled me.”

“I too noticed how strange you looked, Flo,” exclaimed Lady Macdonald; “but I suppose that when one is abstracted and thoughtful, to have a question suddenly put shakes the nerves. However, Lady Saxondale has evidently something to say concerning that Mr. Deveril who gives you lessons: Flo.”

“The most amusing thing in the world!” exclaimed her ladyship pretending rather to address herself to the aunt than to the niece, but furtively surveying the latter with a scrutinizing intentness from the corners of her eyes. “Would you believe it?—this Mr. Deveril who has obtained such renown by his talents and is so extensively patronized in the circles of rank and fashion, seems to have had his head turned by his good fortune. For my part, I always considered him to be a well-behaved unassuming young man, of a sufficiently independent spirit for one of his sex and intelligence, but totally devoid of any insolent pretensions.”

“That is precisely the opinion which I had formed of him,” observed Lady

Macdonald; and I should really feel grieved to be compelled to alter it. What has happened?”

Florina said nothing, but awaited with a torturing suspense the reply that should be given to the question her aunt had just put to Lady Saxondale. She was naturally filled with the strangest misgivings; and even while waiting for the clearing up of her uncertainty and doubt, she felt a thousand wild conjectures sweeping through her brain; for under such painful circumstances one seems to live an entire age in a single minute, and to be tossed upon a sea of troubled emotions vast enough to fill a century, although compressed at the time into the space of a few instants. She however did her best to conceal what she experienced. Her aunt was not noticing her; nor did Lady Saxondale appear to be doing so either—though in reality the latter lost not a single glimmer or shade of those feelings that found a swift brief flitting expression upon the young maiden’s features.

“You asked me what has happened, my dear friend?” resumed Lady Saxondale in reply to Lady Macdonald’s question. “You really never would guess—and you will scarcely know how to believe me when I tell you. In one sense you will perhaps say that I ought to feel complimented—in another indignant and angry—and in a third sense wonderfully amused and diverted.”

“I already begin to understand your meaning,” said Lady Macdonald in astonishment. “But is it really possible——”

“So possible,” returned Lady Saxondale, “that it did actually take place.”

All this was torture and exorcism for poor Florina; and Lady Saxondale saw it. Every varied expression which swept over the young maiden’s countenance, and every new effort which she made to conceal her emotions, tended to confirm Lady Saxondale’s suspicion that she now knew who her rival was in the love of William Deveril. Therefore, to deal in bare allusions without coming immediately to the point itself, was now a source of malignant pleasure to the jealous lady. She saw how she was torturing poor Florina—how she was angling as it were with her feelings—

and she endeavoured to prolong this cruel game as much as possible.

"Yes, my dear friend," she continued, still appearing to address herself almost entirely to Lady Macdonald "what you in your shrewdness have already conjectured did really take place. You may conceive my astonishment! But who would have thought it of this Mr. Deveril? A young man of his intelligence to be so besotted! —a person of his apparent good breeding to be so utterly ignorant of the ordinary proprieties of life, or at least so far to forget them! Is it not strange?"

"Very strange indeed," returned Lady Macdonald. "And yet persons in our sphere of life are liable to the impertinences of presumptuous coxcombs—"

"That is exactly what Mr. Deveril is," observed Lady Saxondale; and she saw that poor Florina was literally writhing on her chair under these cruel inflictions. "The poor silly fool, because he is rather good-looking, has got some little talent, and has been petted and made much of in the houses of the aristocracy to which he has obtained admittance as a preceptor, fancies that the civilites show him are of a different character from what they seem—"

"But you have not yet told us," interrupted Lady Macdonald, "exactly what it is that this Mr. Deveril has done: although, from the remarks you have made, I have not much trouble to guess. In short, I suppose that he has dared to fancy that your ladyship was in love with him?"

"Precisely so," returned Lady Saxondale, who now had the secret satisfaction of noticing with her furtive glances that poor Florina was so cruelly tortured as to have been compelled surreptitiously to wipe away the tears which had started from her eyes. "The incident happened yesterday," continued Lady Saxondale, dwelling with a fiendish delight upon her words as she knew that every syllable fell like successive drops of molten lead upon the most sensitive fibres of Florina's heart. "The girls had gone out for an airing, and I was alone. Mr. Deveril was shown up, because I had a message to deliver from Julian and Constance. It was merely, as you might suppose, to make arrangement for the days and the hours when they would take their lessons in future. It struck me that

there was something very peculiar in the young man's look and manner,—a flushing of the cheeks—a trembling and a hesitation in the speech—an embarrassment and an awkwardness, as if he wanted to say something but dared not. It naturally occurred to me that he had some favour to ask,—perhaps an advance of money, or something of the kind; and feeling really willing to oblige him, but little suspecting what was agitating in his mind, I said something to encourage him to proceed. Then he burst forth into the most impassioned declarations. I listened with astonishment, thinking that he had either gone mad or was reciting some rhapsody from a novel. But as his language grew more vehement and his meaning less and less mistakes, I rose indignantly from my seat. Then he threw himself upon his knees before me, vowing that his happiness—his very life—was in my hands, and that if I did not have mercy upon him he should kill himself in despair."

"I never heard of such a thing," exclaimed Lady Macdonald. "And to think that I should have allowed such an improper person to give lessons to Florina, and to be alone with her!"

"But I had done the same in respect to my daughters, without ever thinking that young man was capable of so much infatuation or arrogance, whichever it may be. And yet," continued Lady Saxondale affecting to laugh gaily, "I really ought to consider myself highly complimented at being thus chosen as the object of his tenderness, when amongst his pupils there were younger and fairer ladies. Really, Flo," she added, now turning towards the soul-tortured maiden, "I am surprised that in his impudence and presumption he has never thrown himself at your feet."

Florina was indeed suffering a martyrdom which was all the more acute—all the more intense—because she dared not give vent to the expression of her agonies in ejaculations or in tears, but was compelled to strain every nerve and exert every effort to conceal them. The colour had however entirely forsaken her cheeks—she looked unnaturally pale and cold—and the smile which she forced herself to assume at Lady Saxondale's remark, was wan and sickly.

"But how did this extraordinary

romance end?" asked Lady Macdonald, who not dreaming that her niece had any extraordinary interest in the conversation, did not pay particular attention to her.

"It terminated, my dear friend," answered Lady Saxondale, "in the only way in which such a proceeding could end. With indignation did I expel Mr. Deveril from my presence, commanding him never to approach the door of Saxondale House again. He went away, muttering threats of revenge, but terribly crestfallen. Now really, I do not wish to inflict an injury upon the poor infatuated, presumptuous young man: but of course I cannot, by passing the matter over in silence, permit him to continue his visits at the houses of my friends."

"I for one shall order the door to be shut in his face next time he comes hither," exclaimed Lady Macdonald; "and I am sure that our dear Florina is as much obliged as I am to your ladyship for having thus lost no time in making us aware of the dangerous character of this young man. And so he threatened you, my dear friend—did he?"

"Yes: but that is always the last resource of vulgar minds," responded Lady Saxondale. "You may readily suppose I cared nothing for his threats—"

"Certainly not," rejoined Lady Macdonald. "Persons in our sphere are beyond the reach of such malevolence. Probably you will have a letter full of contrition in the course of the day."

"Ah! I forgot to observe," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, catching at a remark which thus afforded her a hint for another well-seeming falsehood, that he sent on this morning; but as a matter of course I returned it unopened. And now I must say farewell—for I have got a round of visits to pay."

"And of course you will not forget to put all your friends on their guard against this young man?" said Lady Macdonald.

"It is my duty; and though really a painful one, I shall fulfil it. Good bye, my dear friend. Good bye, dear Flo."

Then, with every appearance of the most affectionate cordiality, did Lady Saxondale press the hand of the young maiden into whose heart she had been planting daggers for a whole half-hour; and without seeming to notice that her unfortunate victim deeply and keenly felt the wounds thus inflicted her

ladyship passed with her wonted mien of graceful dignity out of the room. Florina sought the shade of a window-recess, as if to observe her ladyship take her departure in her splendid equipage, but in reality to conceal the tears which were now gushing forth from her eyes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SISTERS

IN the meantime a scene of some interest was passing at Saxondale House. Juliana and Constance were seated together in an apartment specially devoted to their own use, and where they were wont to practise their music, skim the fashionable novels of the day, and receive their lessons in painting from William Deveril.

We have already stated that Juliana was a perfect likeness of her mother possessing the same aquiline profile, with its aristocratic haughtiness of expression subdued not so much by a natural feminine softness as by a melting sensuousness of look. A keen observer, well skilled in the reading of the human physiognomy, could not have failed to observe that Juliana was a young woman of strong passions—the evidence of which might be read in her eyes, the dewy moisture of her lips, and the voluptuous contours of her form. Being in her twenty-third year, the reader may perhaps wonder,—especially as she was so exceedingly handsome, that she had remained unmarried. Assuredly it was through no fault of her own, nor that of her mother: for Lady Saxondale, without actually condescending to any of those vulgar manoeuvres to which match-making parents have recourse to secure husbands for their daughters, had done her best to "get off," as the term is, both Juliana and Constance. Juliana too had endeavoured to win more than one heart; but somehow or another she had never received an offer which was deemed eligible enough to be accepted. Perhaps it was that she had no fortune of her own: or perhaps despite her fine person, she was not one of those really lovable beings by whom a man was likely to be captivated. Certain it is that at this age when girlhood had completely expanded into womanhood, the Hon. Miss Farefield was still unmarried. But did she love

was there an image constantly uppermost in her heart, and upon which she dwelt day and night? The reader has already received more than one hint to that effect; and in this chapter he will hear still farther upon the subject.

But first let us say a word or two with regard to Constance. She was altogether of a different style of beauty from her sister, save in respect to the well developed proportions of her figure: but she had light hair, a very fair complexion, and soft blue eyes—while Juliana's hair was of raven darkness, her eyes were black and brilliant, and her complexion was of a clear delicate olive. Juliana possessed sentiments more refined and feelings more ethereal than her sister: the same strong passions did not agitate in her soul—and the love of which she was susceptible, may be described as of a far purer and chaster kind than that which could alone occupy the heart of the elder young lady.

While their mother was paying her visit to Lady Macdonald, Juliana and Constance, each dressed in an elegant *negligee*, were seated together, as already described, in the apartment where their mornings were generally passed: for although it was now really the afternoon so far as the proper divisions of time went, yet it is always *morning* in the fashionable world until the dinner-hour, even though this should be as late as six or seven o'clock. The two sisters had been conversing on the incident of the previous day: namely, the story which their mother had told them relative to William Deveril; and by a not unnatural transition they were led on to topics of a more tender, intimate, and secret character.

"I know that you have something in your mind, dear Juliana," said Constance, pursuing the strain into which the discourse had gradually glided; "and though I have noticed it for some few months past, and have often been going to question you on the subject, yet I did not like to do so.

"And why not?" asked Juliana, the rich blood mantling upon her cheeks. "Do you think that I should have refused you my confidence? No: I should have been pleased if you had sought it. But it involves a secret which I could not bring myself to confess of my own accord. It is a revelation which one shrinks from making willingly, and which must be asked for

before it can be breathed even in the ears of a sister."

"I have not questioned you before, Juliana," was the reply given by Constance, "because you are sometimes so impetuous and hasty—"

"Ah! but in this respect I should not have been so," interrupted the elder sister. "And beside, you have a perfect right to seek my fullest confidence. Have you not given me your own? am not acquainted with the secret of *your* love?"

"Oh! then," exclaimed the blushing Constance, "I am to understand that the confession you are now about to make is of the same tender character! I am glad of it—I am delighted at the idea that you yourself also cherish an affection of the heart: for I have sometimes felt uneasy—I know not *why*—at the thought of being alone as it were—"

"In experiencing the bliss of love?" added Juliana with an arch smile upon her lip, but still with a blush upon her cheeks: then as her fine bust heaved with a profound sigh, she added in a low and almost mournful voice, "I am afraid, Constance, that we can scarcely congratulate each other upon the objects in whom our affections are respectively centred."

"What!" exclaimed Constance: "do you mean to share my mother's prejudice against Villebelle? Ah! this has been the source of my uneasiness, when I have reflected that I loved so fondly, and that you being ignorant of what love is could not enter into the spirit of all I experience, and would thus sooner or later be led to view this love of mine with suspicion and displeasure."

"But I hope my dear Constance, that you have never feared I should betray you?" said Juliana, with a reproachful look.

"Oh—betray me—no! I was well aware that you were incapable of such perfidy towards me. But I trembled lest you, dear Juliana, sharing none of my enthusiasm in respect to the Marquis of Villebelle, might endeavour to wean me from that devoted love with which I regard him—might remonstrate against the impropriety of our clandestine meetings—and might even be cold to him when you were present at our interviews. All this have I apprehended—"

"But have your fears been realized?" interrupted Juliana. On the contrary, have I not assisted you in those meet-

ings? have I not even kept watch when the Marquis, stealthily entering the garden, has encountered you there? was it not I who enlisted our maid Mary-Anne in your interest, and induced her to become the bearer of your notes?"

"Yes—all this is true, dearest Juliana; and I was wrong ever to entertain the slightest misgiving in respect to your kindness. But now tell me," continued Constance, "who is the object of this love which your heart cherishes—for that you *do* love, your lips have admitted—yes, and your looks have confirmed the avowal!"

"No, no, Constance—I cannot tell you," murmured Juliana. "I am fearful that you will ridicule—you will despise me!"

"Impossible, dearest sister!" said Constance. "For all the reasons that you yourself have just given when enumerating the services you have rendered me, am I bound not merely to pay your feelings as much respect as I claim for my own, but likewise to give you such succour as may lie in my power."

"But in this case there are no such aids requisite," responded Juliana, evidently approaching with reluctance the full revelation of her secret, and therefore gradually preparing her sister for the final avowal by means of hints and allusions. "In my case, Constance, there need be no interchange of letters—no clandestine meetings in the garden—no scaling of the walls—no posting some one to keep watch—no entrusting the secret to a maid—"

"I cannot understand you," observed Constance, gazing upon her sister with surprise and bewilderment. "If all these accessories and aids are not required, it must because the object of your love would not be distasteful to our mother, our relatives, and our friends."

"Here again you are wrong, Constance," interrupted Juliana. "Listen! When our mother first perceived, a few months ago, that the Marquis of Villebelle began to pay you some attention and that you appeared pleased with his courtesies and his assiduities, she purposely insulted him, though in her own dignified and coldly serene manner; and this was done deliberately in order to convince him that his suit for your hand would never receive a sanction from her lips. The result of that insult was

that the Marquis found himself compelled to abstain from visiting at the house. But still our mother was not satisfied with having thus excluded him from the mansion. She sought to poison your mind against him, so as effectually to raise up a barrier between yourselves. This she did, not pointedly as if she really believed you loved him—but by *inuendo* and by casual remark, always in your presence, but not as if her words were expressly spoken for you, and *for you alone*. She could not deny that he was really what he represented himself—that he was well connected—and that he belonged to one of the oldest families in France: but she gave you to understand that he was a man of broken fortunes—that the sources of his income, poor as it must be, were not ostensible—and that it was even rumoured he had been already married to an English lady, and that his wife was still alive. These and a thousand other things did our mother from time to time let drop, in order to set you against your beloved Etienne de Villebelle."

"But, why my dear Juliana," asked Constance, "recapitulate all these things? why remind me of circumstances which at the time troubled me much? and what possible connexion is there between all this and the revelation which I am awaiting from your lips?"

"I asked you to listen patiently, my dear sister," rejoined Juliana, speaking with the seriousness of one who had not lost the thread of the discourse in any confusion of ideas, but was following it up in her own way and in order to lead her listener on by her own specific path to the point which must be ultimately reached. "What I intended by all those recapitulations was to remind you of the pains and the trouble which our mother has taken in order to set you against the Marquis of Villebelle; and she only desisted from constantly bringing up his name in a disparaging manner when I counselled you to practise a dissimulation that should lead her to believe her words had made the desired impression upon your mind and that your opinion had been altogether altered in respect to him. Well, but as I was saying, you see the immense trouble Lady Saxondale took to set you as she thought against the object of your affections; and had she not been led to believe that she had

succeeded, she would have toiled on unweariedly towards the same end—perhaps, indeed, until she had succeeded in accomplishing it."

"No, no—that were impossible!" exclaimed Constance with fervour: "for you know how tenderly and sincerely I love my Etienne, and how worthy he is of my affection, despite our mother's disparaging reports. But your own secret, Juliana—?"

"I am coming to that point," answered the young lady. "Bro now you conjectured that the object of this love of mine is one whom I need not be ashamed to acknowledge, and who would be acceptable to our mother, our relations, and our friends. Ah! my dear Constance, great as the prejudice of them all at first was against the Marquis of Villebelle—great as it still would be if they knew that your love continues for him—yet would they welcome him into the family as your husband with exultation and enthusiasm, in comparison with the feeling with which they would regard the individual in whom my affections are centred."

"Juliana, you alarm me!" said Constance. "Is it possible that you love some one who is unworthy of you?"

"Ah! that is a phrase liable to many different constructions," responded Juliana. "So long as the object of a lady's love be an honourable, correct, and upright person, who shall dare pronounce him unworthy of that love? But if in addition to being honourable, and virtuous, and good, he is likewise gloriously handsome—a very Adonis—one of nature's sublimest aristocracy so far as personal beauty is concerned,—again, I ask, who shall dare to scorn him as unworthy of the love of a patrician damsæl? Yet nearly all the world would do that! And why? Not so much because he is without fortune—not so much, perhaps, because he is of humble, or what is worse, unknown parentage—but because he is in a menial capacity—because," added Juliana, tremulously and hesitatingly, "he wears that garb which is the badge of servitudo."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Constance, a gleam of the real truth suddenly flashing in upon her mind: "is it possible—?"

"Oh! I have said too much—I have said too much already!" exclaimed Juliana, with bitterness of voice and an almost anguished curling of the lip. "Constance, had your Marquis of

Villebelle been the veriest menial that ever stooped to lower the steps of a proud patrician's carriage, I should not have taught *you* to scorn and despise him—much less have scorned and despised him myself!"

"Forgive me, dear sister—forgive me, if I have wounded your feelings," said Constance, bursting into tears. "It was unintentional—it was rather in surprise than through any other impulse: and as to studied motive, I had none! Forgive me, I say!"—and she threw her arms round her sister's neck.

"Yes, I forgive you, dear Constance," responded Juliana, who in her heart was glad that this little scene had taken place, inasmuch as it had disarmed her sister as it were of the strength of those feelings which she knew from the first must inevitably be excited by the mention of that name which had not as yet passed her lips. "And now since you have guessed what the object of my love is—"

"Yes: it is Frank—Francis Paton," whispered Constance in her sister's ear.

"It is," responded Juliana: and still farther to hush any scruples which her sister might have at listening to such a revelation or admitting the propriety of such an attachment, she at once assumed a proud position, exclaiming, "Yes—it is he—our young page—at present a mere menial in the family! But so enthusiastic is my love, that I could almost glory in it."

Constance did not immediately make any comment; but unwinding her arms from her sister's neck, she slid back to her seat, and could not prevent herself from falling into a profound and serious train of reflections.

"You have given your love, Constance to the Marquis of Villebelle," said Juliana, after a long pause; "and if circumstances do not sooner or later turn up favourably in your behalf, I presume you will marry him in spite of mother, brother, relatives, and friends. In doing this, you will be right; because you will be consulting your happiness, I have told you so all along. But wherefore should you on the one hand consult your happiness, and I sacrifice mine on the other? Much as you love your Etienne, do I love my Francis."

"Then heaven forbid that I should venture to breathe a word against this love of yours!" interrupted Constance, speaking frankly and ingenuously.

"But does Francis know that you love him? have you told him so?"

"Not in words,—not in words" responded Juliana: "but in looks—by the eyes—and by the thousand and one little signs and evidences in which love even unwillingly and unconsciously betrays itself. Do not think, Constance, that all on a sudden I abandoned myself to this passion: do not imagine that the moment I felt its influence I gave it free rein and permitted it to bear me away like a courser that I could stop if I choose, but would not. No—I can assure you, my dear girl, that I wrestled against it—I struggled—and being then deeply imbued with the prejudices in which I had been reared, I also felt humiliated in my own eyes—my pride was hurt—my dignity was offended—I felt indeed as if I were touching upon the threshold of a crime! But the power of love has risen triumphant above all such false notions and wretched artificialities. When I have surveyed that beautiful youth, I have felt—Oh! I have felt, that there is no sacrifice I could not accomplish for his sake. Think of all the young noblemen and gentlemen who frequent our saloons, Constance, and tell me one whose voice possesses a sweet music than that of Francis Paton. Think of them all again—scan them one by one—pass them in review through your mind—and tell me if your thoughts can settle upon any individual amongst them whose countenance is endowed with so sublime and intelligent a beauty! As for gentility, is he not exquisitely genteel, even in that menial garb which he wears? Does it not become him as well as the scarlet uniform upon the tightly-laced figure of the young military fop! Strip him of that menial garb—let him be apparelled in the plain but fashionable clothes of a gentleman—and what evidence of his plebeian origin will remain? Besides, after all, who knows that his origin is plebeian at all? For I believe, from what I have heard, it is involved in much obscurity. He was at first a page at Court—but was suddenly removed, he himself scarcely knows why; and it was Lord Petersfield who recommended him to our mother. To a certain extent there is a sort of mystery hanging over him—a mystery which first attracted my interest, inspired me with sympathy, and led me on to love."

"Ah heaven grant, my dear sister," replied Constance, deeply moved by

Juliana's speech, "that you may prove happy in this love of your's! But you say that as yet you have not in words revealed it to Frank Paton? Think you that he is aware that you love him —?"

"I am sure of it," responded Juliana, with impassioned warmth; and I am equally confident that he loves me in return! But he is timid and bashful, and also retiring—more perhaps from a due sense of his position than naturally so; and never from his lips dare I hope for the first avowal. But from mine—yes, from mine—shall he receive that avowal of love which I know and feel to be reciprocal! Often and often, during the last few weeks, has such an avowal trembled upon my tongue, when for a few minutes I have found myself alone with him; and yet I have not had the courage to let it go forth. But the next opportunity —,"

At this moment the door opened, and Mary-Anne the principal lady's-maid especially devoted to the service of the two sisters, entered the room. The quick glance which she flung around to assure herself that they were alone, and the expression of mingled archness and importance which was upon her very handsome countenance, at once revealed the object of her coming.

"He is here?" said Constance, springing from her seat and bounding towards the lady's-maid.

"No, Miss: but this letter has just arrived:"—and Mary-Anne drew forth from the bosom of her dress a little billet which she handed to her young mistress.

"He will be here at four o'clock!" exclaimed Constance, her beautiful countenance becoming radiant with joy as she glanced over the contents of the letter. "Mary-Anne, you must be upon the look out at the side door as usual."

"Trust me, Miss," replied the abigail, proud of being the confidante of this important secret. "I will take care everything goes well. Her ladyship will not be home till five: she told her own maid so."

Mary-Anne then retired; and Constance, looking at the timepiece, exclaimed "It is half-past three o'clock! I must go up and dress. And you, Juliana—"

"I do not feel in the humour for exertion at present," answered the

elder sister. "I will go up presently. But rest assured, my dear Constance, that while the Marquis is with you in the garden I will keep watch as well as the faithful Mary-Anne."

Constance thanked her sister, and hurried out of the room. Five minutes afterwards the door again opened; and this time it was to give admittance to Francis Paton, who carried in his hand a massive silver salver, upon which there was a periodical of Court News and Fashionable Intelligence to which the young ladies regularly subscribed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LADY AND THE PAGE.

A SUDDEN glow of fervid delight thrilled through the entire form of the Hon. Miss Juliana Farefield, as her magnificent dark eyes settled upon the beautiful countenance and symmetrical figure of Francis Paton. The blood mantled upon her cheeks; and her bosom heaved with a long sigh of pleasure as he approached.

We have already said, when describing this exceedingly fascinating youth, that he had but little colour upon his cheeks: indeed his countenance was somewhat pale—not with a dull pallor of ill-health, but with that animated paleness which is characteristic of a high order of intellectuality. Nevertheless, the little colour that there was on Frank's cheeks rapidly deepened as he beheld the regards of the young lady fixed upon him with an expression at once burning and tender. Nor less did he experience a kindred sensation of ecstatic feeling, as if catching the transfusion of the fervid passion which inspired Juliana's heart.

With tremulous fingers did the patrician lady take the publication off the silver tray; and as she did so, her own fair hand was lightly and intentionally swept over that with which the page was holding the salver. Her eyes were all the time upturned towards him, with an expression of glowing tenderness which he could not mistake, and the spirit of which it was impossible to avoid catching. Moreover, that touch had galvanized him: it had sent its electric influence throughout his entire form—an influence as potent as the magnetic source from whence it had emanated. The salver actually vibrated in his tremu-

lous hand; and suddenly seized with confusion, he was turning away, when Juliana said, as if with the effort of a resolution, "Stop, Frank—I wish to speak to you!"

"Yes, Miss," murmured the youth; and with eyes now bent down, and trembling all over, he remained standing close by the luxurious seat where Miss Farefield's magnificent form was supported by flocculent cushions.

"Frank," she said, "why do you tremble so? why do you look confused—half frightened? Surely you can guess what I am going to say to you—but I myself am now so confused?—and yet this is foolish! Frank" she exclaimed, suddenly raising herself from her indolently lounging posture, and bending upon the almost stupefied youth the entire power of her glorious dark eyes; "I love you—I love you!"

"Heavens, Miss—what do you mean?—what—what—" and the amazed and bewildered Francis stood blushing and trembling, covered with confusion, in the presence of that superb young woman of high patrician birth who had just with the effort of a strong resolution thrown at him the avowal of her love.

"What do I mean, dear boy?" she answered, with glowing cheeks and with a delicious languor floating in the depths of her eyes: "I mean that I can conceal this secret no longer—that I love you—Oh! I love you, with an affection so sincere, a passion so strong, that if you were the son of a Duke instead of what you are, it could not be more powerful! Tell me then, Francis, can you love me in return? do you love me already? Yes, yes—I see that you do—I know it—I read it in your eyes—O heaven! it is a paradise to love and be beloved!"—and as she thus spoke the impassioned young lady snatched the youth's disengaged hand and pressed it with a warmth—nay, almost a frenzied violence, which testified unmistakably to the ardour of her feelings.

"Oh, Miss! what would her ladyship say if she knew this?" exclaimed Francis, more confused than ever.

"She need not know it, my dear boy," returned Juliana. "But tell me—tell me—do you love me? do you like me?"

"Yes—I love you," he answered timidly, while his cheeks were crimson.

"Oh! and I love you also—full well do I love you!" and the impassioned young lady threw her arms round his

neck and kissed him tenderly. "Now do not go away yet—but stop and talk to me a little," she continued, throwing herself back in the chair, but retaining one of his hands clasping in both her own. "Have you any relations or friends to be kind and good to you Frank?"

"I have a sister—but for some time past I have heard nothing of her," said the youth mournfully.

"And this sister—is she older or younger than yourself?" asked Juliana.

"Oh! she is several years older than I," responded the young page.

"And your parents?" said Juliana, inquiringly. "I heard Lord Petersfield one day mentioning to my mother that you never knew them—"

"And that is so far true, Miss," replied Francis, "that even amongst my earliest recollections I can settle my thoughts upon none whom I called either father or mother. And yet there is in my mind the deep conviction that I have more than once seen my mother, though I called her not by that name, nor did she address me as her son!"

"Tell me, my dear Frank, all that you remember in respect to the circumstances of your past life: for if you do not already perceive it, I must assure you that I am deeply deeply interested in everything that concerns you;"—and Juliana gazed with tenderness upon him.

"The earliest reminiscences I have," resumed the young page, "are connected with a pretty little cottage at no great distance from London, but in what part I cannot recollect: and there I and my sister lived with a kind old lady whom we called grandmamma. My sister, who is seven or eight years older than myself, did not then go to school, but was taught the elements of instruction by Mrs. Burnaby: for that was the old lady's name. I remember one day when I was six years old that I and my sister were taken by Mrs. Burnaby in a hired carriage to some considerable distance from home. We stopped at a little village where another carriage was waiting for us; and this second carriage had a coachman with a powdered wig, and a tall footman with a long gold-headed cane in his hand. Both these domestics were dressed in handsome liveries; and the equipage itself was a very fine one. It bore us to a large and splendid looking house in the middle of an immense park. On arriving at this house, Mrs. Burnaby conducted me and my sister

up-stairs to a room where a lady was lying in bed. Two other ladies were seated by the side of the couch; and they spoke very kindly to me and my sister. They then quitted the room; and the moment they were gone, the lady who was in bed took us, kissed us a good deal, and cried very much. She was pale and ill, but so beautiful! We stayed with her some little time—I did not then calculate how long—I was too young for that—but as far as I have since been able to remember, I should think at least an hour. During that interval the lady treated us very kindly—made me sit upon the bed—and played with my hair—patted my face—kissed me—and, in short, lavished upon me the tenderest endearments. She showed an equal affection towards my sister; and when Mrs. Burnaby was about to take us away again, the lady cried so bitterly that I remember both I and my sister cried also. The handsome carriage bore us back to the same spot where it had received us; and there we changed into the hired vehicle which had brought us thither in the earlier part of the day, and which now took us home again. The following week my sister was sent to a boarding-school on the sea-coast: but I remained with Mrs. Burnaby. A year after the mysterious visit to the invalid lady, Mrs. Burnaby one evening took me into London in a hackney-coach; and I remember that it stopped at a place which seemed to me at the time like an old church, for it had a tower with an immense clock-face upon it. We entered this building; and as we ascended the stairs Mrs. Burnaby told me in a whisper that I was going to see the same lady whom I had visited in the country a year before. I was pleased: for I loved that lady on account of her affectionate kindness towards me—and because I felt it was sweet to love and think of her! I recollect a gentleman, dressed in black and with a star on his breast, coming out of a room and speaking for some time in a whisper to Mrs. Burnaby; so that I did not hear what they said. When their conversation was done, the gentleman led us along a passage into a magnificent room, where he left us. There were a great many pictures in that room—some representing male portraits with crowns on their heads and sceptres in their hands; and having seen little wood engravings of similar portraits in the *History of*

England out of which I learnt, I asked Mrs. Burnaby if those were not like-nesses of the same kings that were depicted in the book. But before she gave me any answer the door opened, and that lady whom I had seen at the mansion in the country, made her appearance. She shook hands with Mrs. Burnaby, and catching me up in her arms, covered me with kisses. She was beautifully dressed, and looked much better than when I had seen her lying in bed. Then she was sick and ill, and very pale; now she had a fine colour on her cheeks. I recollect perfectly well asking her whether she was my mamma? But instead of answering me, she pressed me again to her bosom, and her tears moistened my cheeks. On this occasion I was not more than half-an-hour with her; and as Mrs. Burnaby took me away again, we met in the passage that same gentleman whom I had previously seen and who had the star on his breast."

"All this is very singular, my dear Frank," said Julian, who listened with a deepening interest to the youth's recital. "Proceed: I am dying to hear the rest!"

"About ten months after the incident I have related," resumed the young page, "poor Mrs. Burnaby met with a severe accident through a fall; and after a short illness she died. I wept very much, for I loved her dearly: but the servant-woman told me that Mrs. Burnaby was not my grand-mamma at all—and indeed no relation. I remember that the young woman looked very sly and knowing as she told me this, and bids me not mention what she had said to anybody who might come to the cottage to superintend the funeral. I thought it very strange, and put some questions to the servant which were naturally suggested even to my young and inexperienced mind: but she would tell me nothing more—or perhaps she knew no more to tell. The day after Mrs. Burnaby's death, that gentleman whom I had seen with a star upon his breast, came to the cottage; and the first thing he did was to open the deceased lady's desk, take out all her papers, and examine them. Some he burnt—others he put in his pocket: for I was in the room the whole time, I stayed in the house still after the funeral, which I remember was very plainly and privately conducted; and then the gentleman of whom I have spoken, came and

took me away with him in a carriage. We proceeded straight to that same mansion in the country where I had seen the lady for the first time; and there I was again conducted into her presence. She was seated in a splendidly furnished apartment, with those two other ladies who were by her bed-side on the former occasion; and these two ladies having caressed me, quitted the room with the gentleman, leaving me alone the lady. I was then eight years old. She asked me as if I recollect her? and when I replied in the affirmative, she inquired if I had ever thought of her since I had seen her last? I assured her that I had often and often thought of her—that I had cried at night when remembering how she had wept over me—and that I had often dreamt I saw her bending over my couch and looking kindly upon me. Oh! how fast her tears fell as I told her these things;—and she was such a beautiful lady! I loved her so—and I felt so happy when she strained me in her arms and embraced me! On this occasion she kept me with her for several hours; and it was evening when the gentleman of whom I have spoken came to fetch me away. The lady appeared almost frantic at parting from me; and I recollect that she exclaimed more than once, *'Poor boy! perhaps I shall never see thee again!'*—I cried very bitterly; for I felt that I should have liked to live with that lady altogether. She cut off a lock of my hair; and then having embraced me again and again, consigned me back to the care of the gentleman of whom I have spoken. The carriage was in readiness at a side-door; and as I was whirled away from that mansion, I felt so truly unhappy that my young heart seemed as if it would break. The gentleman said little to console me; for although he was not exactly cross, yet he was reserved and distant. We travelled for a few hours, and at length stopped at an hotel in some town, where we passed the night. On the following morning our journey was resumed in the carriage, with post horses; and in the middle of the day we reached Southampton. It was here that my sister was at school; and I was to be placed at the same establishment. But here I should explain that this academy was kept by a gentleman and his wife, who divided it into two branches—the former conducting a boys' seminary, and the latter a school for young ladies, they

having two large houses which adjoined each other. It was in the male department of the academy that I was placed. My sister, who was now sixteen, and whom I had not seen for two years, had grown wondrously: she was a fine tall girl, and looked indeed like a young woman. She had not previously been informed of Mrs. Burnaby's death; and when she now learnt it, she was much afflicted."

"Had your sister hitherto believed that the good old lady was a near relative?" inquired Juliana.

"Yes," returned Francis; "and she was much amazed when I told her what the servant-woman had said to me upon the subject. At that school my sister remained for four years longer, and therefore till she was twenty: but during the latter portion of the time she was there as a teacher or assistant, for which she was paid a regular salary. At the expiration of that period she was told by the school-mistress that a situation had been found for her as governess in a family about to visit the Continent; and with many tears were we thus compelled to separate. I remained at the academy until I was sixteen, passing all the holidays there, and never being visited by a single soul in the shape of relation or friend. So I suppose that I had no relative, save my sister—and no friends in the world!"

"Poor Frank!" murmured Juliana, as the youth's voice sounded low and plaintive to her ears. "But were you well treated during the time?"

"With that negative sort of kindness which is no kindness at all," he answered. "That is to say, I was not ill-treated—I had enough to eat and drink, and an allowance of pocket-money. I was also well clothed; and thus far wanted for nothing. But no kind word was ever spoken to me—no endeavour was made to solace my young heart in the dreary monotony of the life which I led. Well, the eight years passed away; and when I reached the age of sixteen, I was one morning told by the school-master that I was no longer to remain under his care, but was to proceed to London. I asked him what were the future intentions of those invisible persons who appeared to have the control of my destiny? but he was either really ignorant upon the subject, or else had his own private motives for refusing to give me any information thereon. He wrote upon a piece of paper the name of an hotel where I was to stop on my arrival in London;

and giving me money for my journey, he bade me farewell. It was eight o'clock in the evening when I reached the metropolis; and it was at *Hatchett's Hotel* in Piccadilly where, according to the instructions given, I took up my quarters. On the following morning, just as I had concluded my breakfast, I received a letter which had been left for me, and which came from a clerk in the Lord Steward's office at Buckingham Palace. This letter informed me that the situation of Page-of-the-Back-Stairs in the Royal Household was at my service. I was delighted. There seemed to be something grand in being one of the Queen's Pages: and methought it would furnish the stepping-stone to a career in which I should be enabled by zeal and good conduct to push my way to higher posts—perhaps to eminence! With a boating heart and exultant spirit did I repair to the palace; but scarcely had I entered upon the duties of my situation, when I found that they were entirely of a menial character. I had hoped to become a Gentleman Page; but I found myself cruelly disappointed. Yet, what could I do? My means of existence depended upon an absolute resignation to my lot: if I threw up my post, to whom could I apply for employment? I therefore made up my mind to fulfil my destiny with as much cheerfulness as possible: but as I lay awake at nights I could not help asking myself many questions, and suffering my imagination to wander in a bewildering maze of conjectures. Why had I been brought up gently, if only intended for a menial office? wherefore had I been educated with young gentlemen at a boarding-school and taught to believe myself a gentleman also, if no brighter lot than that of a lacquey were in reserve for me? how was it that having in my earliest youth been fondled and caressed by an elegant lady, the influence of her love, even though following me unperceived, had not saved me from such a degradation as this? These and a thousand other questions did I ask myself; but no solution could I ask myself; but no solution could I possibly find for them. Various circumstances however gradually transpired to make me acquainted with new and still more bewildering facts associated with my earlier years. On the very first occasion, after my installation at Bucking-

ham palace, that I had an opportunity of walking out to view the metropolis, I chanced to pass down St. James's Street; and the moment I caught a glimpse of the old red brick building at the bottom, I recognized it. Yes—though nine years had elapsed since I first beheld that old tower with the huge clock-face, I had never forgotten it. Still ignorant of what the building was, I inquired of a passer-by: he told me it was St. James's Palace, and then hurriedly continued his way, thinking that mine was the mere question of curiosity put by a stranger in London. But he left me there, nailed to the spot with astonishment. St. James's Palace! Was that lady who had embraced me so tenderly—who had wept over me—and who did not answer me when I asked if she were my mother—was *she* a dweller in that palace? If so, must she not be connected with the Court? and in my present position was it not probable that I should sooner or later fall in with her? Oh! but if she were dead? I burst into tears at the thought; and perceiving that I had already become the object of attention on the part of several persons in the street, I rushed rapidly on. In order to convince myself that I was not mistaken in respect to the identity of St. James's Palace with that building to which Mrs. Burnaby had conducted me to see the beautiful lady whose tearful countenance was always uppermost in my mind, I approached the edifice and examined its exterior narrowly. Yes—it *was* the same: there could be no doubt of it! And it was in that palace, therefore, that on one occasion I had seen her whom I believed to be my mother!"

Francis Paton again paused through deeply stirred emotions: and Juliana, making him bend down towards her, lavished tender caresses upon his exquisitely handsome countenance. She then boscught him to proceed: and he continued his narrative in the following manner:—

"A few weeks after the incident I have just mentioned, her Majesty the Queen held a levee at St. James's Palace. My duties called me thither; and I inwardly hoped that I should have an opportunity of still farther confirming my belief that it was indeed *there* I had seen the lady of my story. Nor was I disappointed. I recognized the very corridor in which Mrs. Burnaby had stopped to carry on

her whispered conversation with the gentleman having the star upon his breast—or rather the nobleman; for such, since my acquaintance with courtly usages, I had found he must be, the star being the emblem of his aristocratic rank. And the room where I had seen the lady? Yes—I had no trouble in recognizing that also: for there were the portraits of the Kings of England, with the crowns upon their heads and the sceptres in their hands! As I stood in that room surveying those and all other familiar objects, what a gush of memories swept through my brain! what a tide of emotions surged up in my breast! Methought that I still beheld that lady with her beautiful countenance all bedewed in tears, seated on the sofa where I had once seen her, and where too I had sat upon her knees and been strained to her bosom;—and for a few minutes I was blinded with my weeping. Oh! if she were my mother? Why, why was I unacknowledged—and my sister also? Was it that we were the children of shame? Alas, alas, poor mother!"

Again did Francis Paton pause, well-nigh overcome by his emotions; and Juliana, deeply touched by his tale, lavished upon him the tenderest caresses. She spoke soothingly to him—she said all she could think of to break down the artificial barrier which separated them and make him feel himself upon an equal and familiar footing. The youth saw and appreciated these evidences of love on her part, and was profoundly moved thereby; so that it was with a tone and a manner of greater confidence that he thus resumed his narrative:—

"If any doubt had previously existed in my mind in respect to St. James's Palace being the place where I had seen that lady whom I always think of as my mother, it was now cleared up. But who was she? who could she have been? Some one of no mean rank: for on two occasions had I seen elegantly dressed ladies with her, apparently in attendance upon her, and treating her with deference and respect. Moreover, that nobleman with a star upon his breast—was he not in some way closely connected with that lady or with her secret?—for that there was a secret, and that this mystery regarded my sister and myself, it was impossible to doubt. However, I will not dwell upon all the ideas which suggested themselves—all the

conjectures that I formed; because they led to nothing. Let me continue my narrative. Weeks and months passed away; and never amidst the crowd of titled dames who visited at the palace, did I catch a glimpse of that *one* countenance which above all others I would have given worlds to behold!"

"And should you recollect it now, if you beheld that countenance, Frank?" inquired Juliana, more and more interested in the youth's strange and romantic story.

"Recollect it, Miss?" he exclaimed. "Oh! it were impossible to forget it! Even if I had never seen that lady but once—and even if it were only on that first occasion when I was but six years old—her image would have remained indelibly impressed upon my mind. But recollect, Miss. Farefield, that on two subsequent occasions did I behold that lady at about a year's interval each time and that on the last occasion I was eight years old. At this age the mind is callous and insensible to many things, but equally susceptible and sensitive in other things. Amidst the Alpine forests there is a tree which if when a tender sapling, a name be engraved upon it, will, as it grows with the progress of years, retain the inscription thus made: and while increasing in bulk and height, it still preserves the name indented upon its rind—and the larger it becomes the deeper, the wider, and the more palpable grows the inscription also. So it is with certain images which are engraven upon the youthful heart. The human sapling grows up to man's estate, and time instead of obliterating the inscription, deepens it, makes it spread over a wider space of the heart, and allows it not to be effaced."

"Frank," murmured Juliana, gazing upon the youth in mingled astonishment and adoration, "it is something ineffably sweet, though mournful and touching, to hear you talk thus. Oh, if my image could only be imprinted thus indelibly upon your heart, how happy should I be! But ere now you addressed me as Miss Farefield. When we are alone together, let there henceforth be no ceremony between us. Away, away," cried the impassioned young lady, "with all cold formalities! To me you are *Frank*—and to you I am *Juliana*!"

The youth, who in his inexperience of the human heart mistook this gush

of impassioned feelings for the purest and chastest love—a mistake which Juliana herself also made in respect to her own emotions—was enraptured by the language, the looks, and the caresses of that splendid patrician lady; and amidst all the mournful reminiscences which the recital of his history had conjured up, he felt soothed and consoled by her kind words and her tender sympathy: so that bending down as he stood by her chair, he kissed her unask'd. She embraced him with glowing ardour; and after this interchange of caresses, he resumed his narrative.

"I have already said that weeks and months passed away, and gradually the hope of meeting that lady whom I so much longed to see, died within me. At length I was one day startled by encountering in the great hall of Buckingham Palace that nobleman whom I have so often mentioned in my narrative—the one whom I saw first with a star upon his breast, and who had subsequently placed me at the boarding-school at Southampton. Though nine years had elapsed since last I beheld him—and though he looked very much older, and was even much altered, yet was I convinced that it was he. Owing a natural impulse, I hastened forward and presented myself before him. 'My lord,' I said, without then knowing his name, but merely being aware of his rank, 'I am Francis Paton!'—Conceive my astonishment when surveying me with cold and inscrutable look, he answered, 'Well, my lad, and who is Francis Paton?'—I said that I was astonished—I might have added that I was astounded—dismayed; and for the instant it really struck me that I must have made a mistake. But another and still more scrutinizing survey of that nobleman convinced me that I had not: I would have staked my soul upon the issue, could the matter have been put to the test.—'My lord,' I exclaimed, with an indignation which I could not control, 'I am that Francis Paton whom you took from the cottage where Mrs. Burnaby died, to a mansion in the country where I saw a lady whom I had seen before and whom I would give worlds to see again. I am he also whom your lordship placed at a seminary in Southampton; and I am much mistaken if it be not also to your lordship that I am indebted for the bread of servitude which I now eat.'"

"You spoke with spirit, Frank," observed Juliana.

"The last portion of my speech was uttered with bitterness and reproach," exclaimed the youth. "But it was without effect. The nobleman continued cold—unmoved—inscrutable. If he displayed any emotion at all it was an affection of surprise, as he said, 'Young man, you are talking in enigmas. I know nothing of the incidents to which you allude; any they are evidently secrets into which I have no right to pry. But as you have made such a mistake without sinister design, I will not chide. On the contrary, I am rather inclined to take an interest in you, and therefore if ever you need a friend, do not hesitate to apply to me.'—'Oh, my lord,' I exclaimed, torture me not with this assumed ignorance of the past; but tell me who and where is the lady that I long to claim as my mother!'—'Young man,' responded the nobleman, "it is useless for you to address me in this manner. Let it be sufficient for you that the romantic singularity of the present occurrence which had led you to mistake me for another has so far enlisted my sympathy that I will prove your friend.'—He then passed rapidly on through the hall; but ere he issued forth from the palace, I inquired of a fellow-page who made his appearance there at the moment who that nobleman was?—'Lord Petersfield,' was the answer."

"Lord Petersfield! my father's trustee—my brother's guardian—my mother's intimate friend!" exclaimed Juliana. "But I ought to have suspected as much, knowing that it was he who recommended you to Lady Saxondale. Proceed, dear Frank—proceed."

"That Lord Petersfield was he whom I had seen in my earlier years, I felt convinced," resumed the youth, "notwithstanding his denial. Wherefore should he have proffered me his interest—he even used the word friendship—unless I had that claim upon him? But what connexion was there between him and the lady whom I regarded as my mother? was he a relation or merely a friend? Vain queries were these that I put to myself; and how futile were all the conjectures they raised up! But without dwelling at too great a length on this part of my narrative, let me hasten on to relate another incident. A few weeks after I had thus encountered Lord Petersfield, her Majesty the Queen gave a Concert at Buckingham Palace. A thousand cards

of invitation were issued; and at the appointed hour the vicinage of the royal dwelling was crowded with brilliant equipages. My duty on the occasion placed me in a kind of antechamber through which the company had to pass to the Yellow Drawing Room, where the guests were first to assemble ere the Concert Room was thrown open. For some time there was a continuous flow of all the *elite* of rank and fashion: but for a brief interval there was a pause—a lapse, so to speak—in the living stream; and thus two or three minutes passed ere any fresh arrivals made their appearance. At length I heard footsteps approaching—light airy steps—and the rustling of dresses. The next moment two ladies, whose ages might respectively have been thirty-two and thirty—(but they were not sisters, at least to judge from their looks)—entered the antechamber on their way to the State Apartments. Ah, those faces! I recollect them in a moment—they were the same I had seen by the couch of the lady at the country-mansion—the same I had subsequently seen, also, at that mansion, on the last occasion of my being conducted thither! For observe, Miss Farefield—Juliana, I mean—dear Juliana!—observe, I say, that my memory has not only been vividly keen and scrupulously faithful relative to all incidents associated with the mysteries of my earlier years, but will remain immortal in that respect. Be not surprised, therefore, if I at once knew those ladies. Though years had passed over their heads, yet in their passage they had merely developed and perhaps heightened but by no means marred and little changed the mingled sweetness and glory of their charms. Obedient to that same impulse which had urged me to address Lord Petersfield, I sprang forward and threw myself pointedly, but not rudely, in their way.—'What is it?' they both asked in a breath: and at that moment I can well believe they recollect me not.—'I am Francis Paton,' I said; and then I exclaimed, 'Oh, you recognize me! you know me now!' for I saw that they both started and then exchanged looks of mingled uneasiness and surprise. But instantaneously recovering themselves, and as if in pursuance of the same tacitly understood resolve how to act, they said coldly, 'There is some mistake'—and passed on. I fell back confounded, and sank overpowered on a seat: then I burst into tears—for the conviction

struck to my soul that all those who *could* tell me anything of my mother, were inspired by the terrible determination to ignore my claims upon their sympathy and their confidence. The approach of fresh arrivals recalled me to myself: I dashed away the tears from my eyes, and rising from the seat, resumed my post at the door of the antechamber. Then, as I regained my composure—or at least was able to collect my ideas—I resolved to watch those two ladies when they came forth again—ascertain who they were—and thus endeavour, by making inquiries concerning them, to follow up the clue, if any were thus afforded, in the hope of reaching the desired aim and discovering who that lady was that had left her image so indelibly impressed on my soul. But in this design I was disappointed. When the concert broke up, some portion of the visitors took their departure by one avenue of egress and some portion by another; and thus I missed the two ladies whom I so anxiously sought. From that day forth I have never again seen them."

"Did they not visit the palace again?" asked Juliana.

"I cannot say," replied Francis; "for within a week I was somewhat summarily informed that my farther services would be dispensed with, inasmuch as some reduction was to be made in certain departments of the royal household, and that the juniors in each were to be first dismissed. I was however assured that so far from any fault being found with me, I had given the utmost satisfaction; and as a proof thereof three month's salary was paid and the best testimonials presented to me. I could not help thinking that the true cause had not been assigned for my dismissal: a secret voice appeared to whisper within me to the effect that it was found inconvenient, and perhaps dangerous, in certain quarters to stand the chance of being accosted or importuned by me when visiting the palace. However, the day came for me to leave—and I departed accordingly."

"Then, no doubt you remembered Lord Petersfield's promise?" said Juliana inquiringly."

"Yes; but it was far less with the idea of seeking his aid in procuring another situation, than to have an opportunity of pleading my cause before him once more, that I sought

him at his mansion. The moment sent up my name his lordship received me—and received me too with kindness; that is to say, with as much kindness as it is in his nature to show. I told him of my dismissal from the palace, at which he appeared to be surprised; though in my own mind I had the intuitive conviction that this surprise was merely feigned on his part. I threw myself at his feet, beseeching and imploring that he would say but one word to lift the veil which enveloped the past in so much mystery; but he was immovable! He pretended to pity me, and affected to believe that I must be labouring under some monomaniac idea. In short, I could obtain nothing from him in the shape of revelation. He spoke kindly to me, as I ere now said—and observed that he could at once help me to another situation as he happened to be aware at the time that his friend Lady Saxondale needed a page. He gave me a note to her ladyship; and thus was it that I entered this mansion."

Francis Paton ceased speaking; and the big tears rolled down his cheeks, as all the incidents of the past were thus brought so vividly back to his mind. Again did Juliana do her best to soothe and console him; and the youth was both soothed and consoled!

"But during all the latter portion of your narrative," said the Hon. Miss Farefield, "you have lost sight of your sister. Believe me, my dear Frank, I am interested in her for your sake."

"I have already given you to understand," answered the youth, "that when she was twenty—that was about six years ago—she entered a family in the capacity of governess, and proceeded to the Continent. From time to time I received letters from her, and occasionally little presents, whenever she had an opportunity of sending to England. But at length, after the lapse of a couple of years, her letters ceased altogether. When I became uneasy at this silence, the schoolmaster,—for I was then, you know, at Southampton,—said many things to relieve me of my apprehensions; and it even struck me that he knew more than he chose to admit. But this might have been mere fancy on my part. Suffice it to say, Miss Farefield—Juliana—that for the last four years I have heard nothing from my sister—"

"Hush! footsteps are approaching!"

suddenly exclaimed Juliana, whose quick ears had caught the sound.

the arms of her lover, the Marquis de Villebelle.

As she thus spoke she pressed the young page's hand tenderly—threw a fervid look of passion upon him—and then composed herself in her seat with the air of one just beginning to turn over the leaves of a periodical placed in her hand. Francis Paton retreated towards the door, which opened it the instant; and Constance, now elegantly dressed in evening costume, reappeared. She at once perceived by the young page's manner that Juliana had been speaking to him upon the tender subject the secret of which she herself had that day learnt; and as the door closed behind the beautiful youth, she advanced up to her sister, saying in a gentle voice, "I hope that you are happy now?"

"Yes, dear Constance—supremely happy!" exclaimed Juliana, rising from her seat and embracing her sister in the effusion of that joy which her long interview with the young page had excited in her soul. "I have revealed the secret of my love—and he loves me in return. But you would scarcely believe how intellectual he is! Oh, what a scandal and a shame ever to have doomed Francis Paton to servitude! Besides, he has told me the history of his life; and it is a history so full of strange romance and profound mystery, that I feel for him an illimitable sympathy as well as the tenderest love. But all these things I will explain to you another time——"

At this moment the door opened—and Mary-Anne the lady's-maid entered the room.

"He is come!" said Constance quickly, while a glow of pleasure suffused itself upon her countenance.

"My Lord Marquis is in the garden," returned Mary-Anne, with the mysterious look of a confidante.

"Oh, then I will proceed thither at once!" exclaimed Constance. "Give me my guitar—I will take it with me—it serves as an apology for burying myself in the shady recesses of the arbour should I be noticed proceeding thither by the domestics. But you must keep watch, Mary-Anne—and you also, dear sister!"

"Fear not," responded Juliana: "you shall not be surprised by any one."

Constance accordingly took her guitar, and tripping lightly down stairs, proceeded to the garden, where in a few months she was clasped in

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LADY'S-MAID.—THE STOLEN

INTERVIEW.

MARY-ANNE was one of the handsomest as well as the astutest and discreetest of lady's-maids. She was a fine, tall, well-grown young woman, of about three and twenty—with a figure that had something brilliant and splendid in its Diana-like proportions. Many a lady of rank who shone in the gorgeous saloons of fashion, might have envied Mary-Anne that superb shape: for nothing could be more graceful than the slope of the shoulders, the bend in the back, the symmetry of the waist, and the sweeping length of limb whose fine proportions were displayed in one sense though concealed in another by the long skirt of the dress.

Mary-Anne's countenance was not merely pretty—it was handsome. Her brown hair was of remarkable luxuriance; and whether arranged in plain bands in the morning-part of the day, or in long shining ringlets in the evening, it set off to equal advantage the fine face that beamed with mingled archness and good-humour. There was something slightly coquettish in Mary-Anne's air and appearance. She wore an elegant little French cap as if she knew that it became her admirably; and every detail of her toilet denoted not merely a scrupulous neatness, but likewise a tastefulness which nearly bordered upon elegance as a lady's maid could possibly throw into her apparel. Her clothes were evidently made by no cheap milliner nor clumsy seamstress, but fitted her as perfectly as if she were a lady of rank and fortune. As a matter of course she had handsome perquisites in the discarded dresses of her young mistresses; but these were never cobbled up anew for Miss Mary-Anne. She accepted cast off clothes, but would not wear them—nor she indeed! She disposed of them to an old Jewess who regularly paid her a visit by the aera-steps once every month to purchase whatsoever she might have to dispose of: so that with the produce of these little sales and a small portion of her own hand-

some wages in addition, Mary-Anne was enabled to find herself in frequent new dress of good material. As for the making-up of these dresses, that was done for nothing by the milliner who had all the custom of Lady Saxondale and her daughters—the said milliner finding it entirely to her interest to keep good friends with so important a person as the Hon. Miss Farefield's principal lady's maid.

Mary-Anne had, as we have already stated, a slightly coquettish air; and this, blended with a certain archness of expression and roguishness of smile, gave her a most *piquant* and interesting appearance. She looked the lady's maid. From the midst of a thousand females assembled together, of every variety of occupation and grade, you might single out Mary-Anne as the abigail of aristocratic mistresses. Nor was this all. A close observer could not fail to perceive that she was a *confidential* maid—deep in the secrets of the young ladies whom she served. Yet be it parenthetically remarked that she was not initiated in that particular secret which involved Juliana's attachment for the young page.

In order to render this portrait as complete as possible, we must observe that Mary-Anne possessed a very fine pair of dark hazel eyes, which she could use with no small effect when she chose, but all the glances of which were so tutored and disciplined as to be completely under her own control. Thus, in the presence of Lady Saxondale she appeared sedate and respectful, almost to demureness: with her young mistresses there was a more joyous and genial light dancing in her eyes, indicating that she felt herself the petted and favourite confidante, but still so far subdued as likewise to show that she knew her place too well to take any advantage of the confidence she thus enjoyed. Indeed, there was never anything like undue familiarity in her look, her words, or her manner. The brows that set off those fine eyes were darkly pencilled and splendidly arched; and the lashes which served as a screen for her looks when she chose thus to veil them, were of a darker shade still and resembled thick silken fringes. Her nose was straight—her mouth small and pouting, the lips being of a rich redness and always of a delicious moisture: they were lips that seemed

to invite kisses, and appeared fully capable of giving them back again with additional sweets. The expression of her countenance, though naturally a mixture of good-humour, archness, and roguishness, was variable; because, as we have already stated, she had the faculty of tutoring it to assume any look that suited the circumstance of the moment.

Although so remarkably handsome, and therefore exposed to many temptations, especially on the part of the profligate Lord Saxondale,—and though by no means of a cold temperament, but on the contrary, with the rich warm blood of youth glowing in her veins,—Miss Mary-Anne was notwithstanding unquestionably virtuous. She could flirt with handsome valets and the upper class of male domestics—she could even smile mischievously and display her fine white teeth when any aristocratic, young exquisite, visiting at the mansion, paid her a passing compliment if they chanced to meet upon the stairs;—but if any improper overtures were made to Miss Mary-Anne she knew how to resent them in a manner that would most likely silence for ever him who insulted her with such proposals. We do not know that it can be exactly said she was virtuous from principle: indeed it would be wrong to make any such assertion. But she was a saving and prudent young woman in money-matters—had thorough respectable notions with regard to her character and looked forward to a good marriage with some deserving and eligible person in her own sphere of life. Thus, though Mary-Anne could smile roguishly—assist in a love-intrigue carried on by others—and deliver a *billet doux* with all the slyness and discretion imaginable,—and though on occasion she could not merely flirt but even romp with the domestics in the servants' hall on a Christmas or New Year's eve,—yet there was a line at which she stopped short, and beyond which it would be very difficult to induce her to take a false step.

Such was the lady's maid who possessed the confidence of her two young mistresses generally, but of Constance especially; and she had proved herself a most efficient auxiliary in enabling this latter lady to carry on her secret interviews with the Marquis of Villabelle. She was therefore now on the alert to watch for the return of Lady

Saxondale, or the presence of any other person who might interrupt the meeting of the lovers in the garden.

We should observe that of all the splendid mansions in Park Lane, not one possessed so large a piece of ground in the rear as Saxondale House. Not that this was very large either; and for a garden in the country it would have been ridiculously small; but for a town-residence, it was the very reverse. Being crowded with evergreens, which had grown to a considerable size and formed shady walks,—indeed, embowering some spots so completely as to shut out the view from all the adjacent windows—this garden was well adapted for the meeting of lovers. But how was it, the reader may ask, that Constance could not devise opportunities of seeing the Marquis of Villebelle in places where they might be still less liable to interruption? Those who are acquainted with the routine of fashionable life, must be aware how difficult it is for young unmarried ladies to find such occasions. If the Miss Farefields went out to walk, they had a tall footman following at a short distance; and if they went out in the carriage, it was impossible to alight and leave the equipage for any length of time, unattended and alone, without incurring the risk of gossiping observations on the part of the servants. If they went shopping they were certain to meet so many of their acquaintances that it would be dangerous to seek such opportunities for the interviews of love! and inasmuch as the Marquis of Villebelle had for some months ceased to visit at Saxondale House, the only way in which Constance could contrive to pass an hour alone with him, was by these clandestine meetings in the garden. The servants, generally, thought that the young lady buried herself for an occasional hour in the umbrageous recesses of the garden for the purpose of practising on her guitar; and thus when the sounds of that instrument were heard emanating from amidst the evergreens at the extremity of the enclosure, none of the domestics would venture to penetrate thither. A side-door, of which it was easy for Mary-Anne to obtain the key, was wont to afford admission to the Marquis of Villebelle: but on three or four occasions when a half-hour's interview was to be stolen after dusk, and when the key was not immediately forthcoming, the intrepid Frenchman had not hesitated to scale the boundary-wall.

Let us now introduce this foreign nobleman to our readers. He was about twenty-eight years of age—remarkably handsome—with a somewhat pensive and even melancholy expression of countenance. Tall and well-formed, his figure combined dignity and elegance. He had dark hair, clustering in natural waves above a forehead of noble height. His eyes were large and black, and with a peculiar softness of look. There was a very pleasing expression about his lips; and his teeth were white and faultlessly even. He spoke the English language with a perfect accent and fluency: his voice, naturally low, was full of a deep music that gave to its tones a wonderful fascination when breathing the language of love.

Such was the Marquis of Villebelle. His father, who had been dead some years, was a refugee during the period of the Empire; and having lived a considerable time in England, he for this and other reasons conceived such an affection for its hospitable shores that he had his son educated at one of our public schools. Hence the intimate acquaintance which Etienne possessed in all things pertaining to the English language and literature; and in habits, tastes, and ideas, as well as in personal appearance, the Marquis of Villebelle was much more of an Englishman than a Frenchman. By the time he had finished his education in this country, his father died; and he was recalled to France to look after his affairs. For some years he remained on the Continent without revisiting England; but at length he returned to the land which he loved better than his own. This was about twelve months prior to the date when we now introduce him to our readers, and when we find him seeking a clandestine interview with the beautiful Constance Farefield in the garden of Saxondale House.

Fond and affectionate was the meeting of the lovers. The Marquis strained Constance to his breast, pouring the delicious language of love in her ears; and she clung to him with all a maiden's confiding affection, drinking in the low melting harmony of his voice. She looked sweetly beautiful, did Constance Farefield! for she was dressed in evening costume so that she might be in readiness for the dinner-table when the hour should come. Her long fair hair flowed in

thick clusters upon her white shoulders; and though there was no small contrast between her style of beauty and the personal attributes of her lover, yet were it impossible to deny that they would make a remarkably interesting couple.

"How long, my sweet Constance," said the Marquis, as they sat down together upon a bench beneath the verdant covering of the trees, "are we to pursue this stealthy and clandestine course?—a course which though marked by so many hours of indescribable happiness, has nevertheless in it something humiliating alike to your feelings and mine."

"What would you have me do, my beloved Etienne?" asked Constance, gazing affectionately upon his countenance. "I tremble at the idea of a furtive marriage—"

"Listen my sweet Constance," exclaimed the Marquis, in a tone of firmness and resolution. "I have not concealed from you that my resources are small—that indeed they are so limited as to be only sufficient for *one*, and would constitute privation if not poverty for *two*. But I have now the hope of obtaining diplomatic employment from King Louis Philippe's government. The recent change in the French Ministry has brought into power an old and devoted friend of my father's; and I believe therefore that I shall not *now* have to ask a favour in vain. Tell me then, Constance—tell me, my well-beloved, will you consent to become mine if I succeed in obtaining a post which shall guarantee me the means of maintaining you in comfort, if not in splendour?"

"Splendour, my dear Etienne!" returned Constance. "Oh! let not that world be associated with love! I seek not for splendour—I am sick of the present splendour in which I live! The gaieties, the dissipations, and the frivolities of fashionable life seem a mockery to the soul that longs for a blissful seclusion with the object of its love. Think not therefore that if in wedding you I should wed even poverty, that reproaches or regrets would ever fall from my lips. No, no—that were impossible! But—"

"You hesitate, Constance—you hesitate?" murmured Etienne, as his arm gently encircled her waist; and he gazed fondly upon the countenance on which a shade of mournfulness had suddenly settled. "Tell me, my sweet

girl, wherefore do you hesitate? Have you no confidence in my love? or do you believe I am the unprincipled adventurer that I know your mother has sought to represent me?"

"No, no—not for an instant do I entertain such a dishonouring, such an injurious thought!"—and Constance showed by her looks, her accents, and her manner that she was deeply pained by the remark her lover had made. "Besides, Etienne, what could you think of me, if supposing for a moment that I did entertain such a dark suspicion, you still find me meeting you thus—accepting the assurances of your love—giving you mine in return—and willing to entrust all my life's happiness to your keeping? No—deeply and devotedly as I love you, if I thought that you were other than I believe you to be, we should part at once—never to meet again! And if I could not tear forth this love from the depths of my soul, I would rather suffer it to devour my heart in secret than let it hurry me on into degradation and error. Moreover, you have dealt candidly with me in respect to your circumstances—"

"And yet again you hesitate, Constance?" said the Marquis, perceiving that she stopped short as if about to give utterance to something which she nevertheless trembled to speak.

"Oh! I will be candid with you—I will be candid with you!" rejoined Constance. "You have asked me how long these stealthy interviews are to continue? and you know, indeed you have more than hinted, that the only way to annihilate the necessity thereof is by our marriage. Now," continued Constance, bending down her looks and speaking in a low tremulous tone, "amongst the various things which my mother has at different times let drop concerning you, there is one allegation on which I have never touched before—which I have never even hinted to you—and to which I would not allude, however distantly, because I dared not so far shock your feelings—"

"Speak, speak, Constance! be frank and candid!" said the Marquis: but his own voice was now trembling as if with anxiety and suspense, and the arm that encircled the maiden's waist was trembling likewise.

"Oh! I dare not—no, I dare not proceed farther!" murmured Constance, now bursting into tears, as a feeling of deep despondency suddenly seized

upon her: for indeed it struck her that the matter to which she was thus alluding did not altogether involve a wanton calumny.

"Constance!" exclaimed the Marquis, more vehemently than he was wont to speak; "you alarm me!—what means this outburst of emotion? Is it something so very serious—or so very terrible?"

"Ah! it would be alike serious and terrible if true!" responded the young lady, now suddenly raising her eyes and gazing with a mixture of inquiring earnestness and reviving confidence in her lover's countenance. "But no—it is impossible—it cannot be true! You would not deceive me thus!"

"Constance, what mean you? what mean you?" exclaimed the Marquis, painfully excited. "Do not hesitate to speak! There must be no reserve.

"No, there must not be—I feel that there must not be!" interrupted the young lady. "Some months have elapsed since first from my mother's lips dropped the statement which now weighs upon my mind; and for the reasons I have already explained, I would not mention it to you. But this day I have had a serious conversation with my sister—and I have been led more than ever to feel the importance of removing every doubt and dissipating every suspicion,—the more so, since you yourself, Etienne, began the conversation ere now by the assurance that a favourable turn in your circumstances would soon enable you to conduct me to the altar. Therefore now—on this present occasion —must we converse frankly——"

"It is what I wish, Constance! I have already told you so!" said the Marquis with some degree of vehemence; and I can assure you, my sweet girl, that you are torturing me most acutely by this delay in telling me everything. Say what it is that hangs like a doubt upon your mind, and to which you are so reluctant to give utterance."

"Etienne," responded Constance, raising her beautiful blue eyes and fixing them earnestly upon her lover, "I am told that you have already been married; and that although separated from your wife, she is still alive!"

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the feet of the Marquis of Villebelle, he could not have been more dismayed. It was a perfect consternation that seized upon him: he turned pale as death—the arm that was engirdling

Constance, fell as if palsied from her waist—and he gazed upon her in vacant bewilderment.

"O God!" cried the unhappy young lady. "It is true—it is too true!" and covering her face with her hands, she burst into passionate flood of weeping.

"Yes, it is true, it is true!" echoed the Marquis, in a tone of rending agony. "But good God! how could this secret have been known?"

"Ah! little matter how it was known," murmured Constance, stricken with despair, "since you confess it is the truth. O Etienne, wherefore have you deceived me thus?"—and starting from her seat, she was about to break away from him with frantic excitement, when he took her hand—he fell upon his knees—he besought her to remain—he implored her to tarry for a few minutes to hear him.

There was a desperation in his looks and a wildness in his tone which frightened Constance Farefield; and though she felt hurt, mortified, and wounded in all her keenest sensibilities,—though it appeared as if all the happiness of her life were suddenly annihilated by a single blow,—yet she could not leave him thus, for she felt that she loved him still.

"Speak, Etienne," she said, in a low deep tone clouded with ineffable emotions. "I will not refuse you a hearing."

She resumed her seat: he placed himself by her side, and would have still retained her mind in his own—but she gently withdrew it; and then her grief burst forth anew in convulsive sobs.

"Oh! calm yourself, calm yourself, I implore you!" he said in accents of passionate entreaty. "Would you see me kill myself at your feet? But I can endure anything rather than this anguish of yours! The spectacle drives me mad—because it is I who have caused it. Yet if you knew all——"

"Then tell me everything—be frank and candid with me!" said Constance. "And, Oh!" she added, in a voice full of gushing emotion, "if there be extenuation on your behalf, God knows that I shall only be too willing to admit it!"

"If you will grant me your patience, Constance," resumed the Marquis, "I will tell you everything; and you will hear one of the most extraordinary histories that ever fell from the

lips of human being. Talk of the incidents of novels and romances being extravagant! their interest palls and wanes into mawkish insipidity—their excitement subsides into monotony and dullness—when compared with the story I am about to relate! And that there is extenuation, if not a complete vindication for the course I have pursued in respect to yourself, Constance, I may venture to promise. Nay—I do not even know but that I should have been fully justified in averring that I am *not* a married man at this moment!"

"Oh! if all this be true!" exclaimed Constance, her countenance brightening up with the animation of hope: for her's had a few moments back been a despair so profound that even the slightest glimmering which bade her hope again, was a relief ineffable.

"Shall I commence at once?" asked the French nobleman, in a low soft voice: and again he took her hand which was not now withdrawn.

"Yes—proceed Etienne—proceed—and may God grant—But I am tortured with suspense! Proceed!"

The Marquis of Villebelle accordingly commenced in the following manner:—

"You are aware that my father, being devoted to the cause of the Bourbons, lost all his immense estates in France by confiscation when the first Revolution broke out: you are likewise aware that when the Bourbons were restored, they behaved with the deepest ingratitude to my father, refusing him any indemnification for the losses he had sustained on their behalf. It was through disgust at their conduct, as much as through love for this country, that he preferred a residence in England rather than in his own native land. It is exactly eight years ago—consequently, in 1836—that my father returned for the last time to France, in the hope of receiving from the hand of Louis Philippe (who had then been six years on the throne) that justice which had been denied by Louis XVIII and Charles X. But scarcely had he set foot on his native soil, when he was seized with a dangerous illness, which in a few days proved fatal. I had been left behind him in England; but upon receiving the said intelligence of my father's death, I hastened to Paris. After the funeral I proceeded, by the aid of a notary, to examine into my late parents' affairs. Alas! I found them in the most deplorable condition.

In short, I inherited little beyond the bare title of a Marquis—and Oh! how valueless was that title! Better, better far to have been reared to some honest trade, than to have been brought up with the lofty notions of rank and high birth! My condition was hopeless in the extreme. I had no relations in England in the world—for all my kindred alive on my father's and mother's side, were either dead or dispersed by various circumstances and vicissitudes over the face of the earth. What was I to do? The notary suggested that I should memorialize King Louis Philippe, setting forth the claim which I inherited from my father, and explaining my position. I adopted this course: but Louis Philippe had no sympathy with the old nobility who had saved the elder branch of Bourbons, but hated the representative of the younger. My memorial therefore produced no effect. Time passed on, and I endeavoured to obtain the influence of some eminent men to induce the King to alter his decision, but all in vain: and while I was thus suffering the tortures of hope deferred, my slender means were rapidly disappearing. Thus nearly three years passed away; and at length I could no longer close my eyes to the conviction that I had nothing to expect from the hand of the Rovility of France. I am now speaking of exactly five years ago^{at} which period the incident occurred to which all that I have just been saying is but the necessary preface."

The Marquis of Villebelle paused in the sadness of the memories conjured up by his narrative; and Constance could not help experiencing the most tender interest on his behalf. She even ceased to recollect for the moment the deception which he had practised towards her; and he felt that her hand imparted a fond pressure to his own as he held it in his clasp.

"Five years ago, then—at the period of which I am speaking" continued the Marquis of Villebelle. "I found myself utterly ruined—I may say even penniless, houseless, and friendless. Alas! Constance, humiliating as it is to a man of proud spirit and elevated notions to make such a confession, yet for the sake of truth am I bound to state that no pauper grovelling upon the face of the earth was at that moment more destitute than I. What was to become of me? My education had not fitted me for business-habits; and therefore I knew beforehand that it was vain to seek the situation of a

clerk. Should I become a private soldier? No: I could not bear the idea of serving with my sword that monarch who had behaved so ungratefully to my father and so scornfully towards myself. Yet was it absolutely necessary to do something; for I had not even where to lay my head, nor the smallest coin in my pocket. Suicide—Ah! you may well start, my beloved Constance!—but *that* appeared to be the only alternative! It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening, in the month of June, exactly five years ago, that after rambling about Paris the whole day in a state of mind more easily imagined than depicted, I was bending my way towards one of the bridges—I will not repeat with what intention—when I suddenly heard myself called by name. I looked up, and behold before me, by the light streaming from a shop-window, a tall good-looking middle-aged gentleman, whom by his very appearance it was easy to recognize as an Englishman. He said, 'I presume that I am not wrong in addressing you as the Count de Villebelle?'—I replied that my father had for some time been dead, and that I was now the Marquis of Villebelle; and in the bitterness of my spirit I added something to the effect that the empty title of Marquis was everything I possessed in the world.—'Ah!' ejaculated the Englishman; 'is it so? I was about to solicit your advice on a certain point; but it may be that in this wrecked condition of your fortunes you yourself will serve my purpose.'—Those last words he had muttered in a musing tone, but audibly enough for me to catch them. There was something in them which appeared to shed a gleam of hope on the desolate darkness of mind; and as a drowning man grasps at a straw, did I clutch at what the Englishman had just said. He invited me to follow him into an adjacent wine-shop, where he ordered a private room and refreshments to be served up. We sat down together; and the Englishman questioned me most minutely respecting my circumstances. There appeared to be a certain frankness about him which inspired me with confidence; and moreover it was so necessary for me to *hope*—I who had been but a few minutes before environed by the darkness of despair! I explained to the Englishman my precise position, not even withholding the fact that at the

very instant I had encountered him I was contemplating—but of that no matter—I will not name the horrid thing again. Suffice it to say that he listened with the deepest attention and interest to all I told him; and when he had done questioning me, I asked him who he was and how he had happened to know me? He replied that he had met me in company with my father some four or five years back in England, when I was a youth; but though methought that his countenance was not wholly unfamiliar, yet I could not recollect where I had seen him before. He then proceeded to tell me that if the proposition he was about to make suited my views, it would be necessary for him to reveal his name, and also that of a young lady of whom he would have to speak: but ere he mentioned those names he would have to exact from me the most solemn, sacred, and binding oath that I would never reveal them in connexion with the transaction he was about to submit to my consideration. My case was too desperate to allow me to offer any objection to whatever terms of secrecy he might stipulate: and I bade him proceed. He then addressed me as follows:—'There is an English lady for whom I am anxious to find a husband, who must be a foreigner, and not only of a good family, possessed of a title of nobility. It is not under any circumstances of dishonour in respect to the lady herself that the necessity for at once marrying her thus exists. She is pure and spotless, so far as it is possible for any one to judge of the character of a woman or become a guarantee for her chastity. Therefore it is to cover no fault that this speedy matrimonial alliance is sought for. What the circumstances are which render it necessary, cannot be explained. She is exceedingly handsome: but her beauty will matter little to him who becomes her husband, inasmuch as the moment after the ceremony they will be separated and will see each other no more. You now understand me. If you think fit to bestow your name—for it will be naught beyond the mere bestowal of a name—upon the lady in question, you shall receive the sum of five thousand pounds, speaking in English money, the moment after the ceremony has taken place. Such is my proposition. Take twelve, or even twenty-four hours to consider it, if

you like; but at the expiration of that interval your answer must be given."

The Marquis of Villebelle paused; and Constance who had listened with a deep and absorbing interest, now gave vent to an ejaculation of astonishment.

"You may well be surprised, sweet girl," said the Marquis: "for I myself was astounded by the strangeness of the Englishman's proposition. And yet I was scarcely displeased at it. Five thousand pounds—a hundred and twenty-five thousand francs—to a man who was homeless, penniless, friendless, and starving! The temptation was too great: and after all, what was the service to be rendered in order to procure such a sum? Merely the bestowal of a name and title so utterly worthless to me that a few minutes back I had been hurrying forward to bury them along with myself in the deep waters of the Seine. Oh! you can scarcely think ill of me Constance, when I confess that I found the offer too cheering, too magnificent, to be refused, and that instead of taking twenty-four hours or even twelve hours to reflect upon the point, I gave my assent at once. The Englishman then told me his own name and that of the young lady to whom I was to be married. Her surname was quite different from his own; and therefore I did not suppose her to be his daughter. I however asked him if such were the case? and he said she was not—but he enjoined me not to question him any farther, as there was so deep a mystery attached to this young lady and the necessity for maintaining it was so absolute, he must decline furnishing me with any clue for its unravelment. He then placed a purse of money in my hand and bade me meet him at the same place on the following day at eleven o'clock. We separated—and was I no longer houseless nor penniless: but throughout the night I could scarcely close my eyes in slumber. The proposition to which I had assented was so extraordinary that again and again did I hesitate whether to proceed any farther in the matter: but the grim gaunt spectre of poverty constantly rose up before my eyes and made all my scruples vanish. Morning came; and with some portion of the money contained in the purse I made such improvements in my toilet as were suitable for the ceremony about to take place. Punctual to the hour was I at the wine-shop;—the

Englishman had already arrived and was waiting for me. He doubtless saw by my looks that I had not changed my mind; and he did not therefore ask me the question. A hackney-coach was summoned, and he ordered it to take us to an hotel, which he named in another part of Paris. On arriving there, he introduced me to a suite of apartments, in one of which he requested me to be seated for a few minutes. He then passed into an inner room, and shortly reappeared, accompanied by three ladies. One was nearly as old as himself, and whom he introduced as his wife. Another was much younger, and was intended to act as bridesmaid. I believe she was some relation of his, but I do not exactly know of what degree. The third was the young lady on whom I was to bestow my name. She was indeed handsome—very handsome. Do not be jealous, Constance, at the observation I have made; for while doing justice to her personal appearance, I may with equal candour declare that her's was not a style of beauty adapted to my taste. On this part of my narrative I will not however dwell. Suffice it to say that she appeared to treat the strange proceeding with a coldness almost amounting to an indifference that was not the least extraordinary feature in the whole transaction: for I could not help asking myself of what nature might be the circumstances that rendered necessary so singular a matrimonial alliance? To bestow upon that young lady a husband who was to be no husband at all—to give her a name which she might bear in the world apart from him of whom she had derived it—to make her a wife, yet leave her to a single and virgin state of existence, if chaste she really were and meant to continue,—all this seemed so monstrous, so unnatural, that I shrank from the bare idea on being introduced to her. There was not however much leisure permitted for meditation: because the Englishman hurried us all down to a plain carriage that was waiting in the courtyard of the hotel, and we drove off the British Ambassador's chapel, which was at no great distance. I should observe that the ladies were simply dressed; with no conspicuous evidences that this was a bridal party. All the preliminaries for the solemn ceremony had been arranged with due care; so that on reaching the chapel we found the Chaplain and clerk in attendance;

and the proceedings at once commenced. I must confess that I experienced a strange sensation as I went through that ceremony. My conscience smote me with a pang resembling a remorse: for I could not help feeling that it was a veritable mockery of one of the holiest rites of the Christian Church. I glanced towards my bride, and observed that she was still as calm, collected, and even indifferent as if it were some ordinary transaction, and not one of the serious character that it really was. For in thus bestowing her hand upon me, was not this young woman, in the vigour of youth and in the bloom of her beauty, suicidally destroying all hope of ever enjoying real happiness in the wedded state? In short, by this very marriage with me, was she not shutting herself out from the prospect of ever marrying another, however deeply she might be led to love and however fondly she might be beloved in return? But it is useless now to moralize on all the features and associations of that mysterious transaction. Suffice it to say that the ceremony was accomplished, and that the young lady within the space of a few brief minutes was made Marchioness of Villebelle. We all re-entered the carriage, and returned to the hotel—the Englishman and his wife conversing the whole time on general and indifferent topics for the evident purpose of preventing that awkwardness and embarrassment which under such extraordinary circumstances would have otherwise prevailed. On arriving at the hotel, the three ladies each shook hands with me and bade me adieu,—my wife exhibiting no more excitement or emotion than the other two. They then all three passed to the inner room, and I remained alone with the Englishman. He forthwith began to count down a number of bank-notes upon the table; and as he thus paid me the promised reward for the singular and mysterious service I had rendered, he said, 'Do not think that because we are now about to part, I shall altogether lose sight of you. If fortune smiles upon you and you continue independent of any friendly aid, you will never hear from me: but if adversity overtakes you and you fall into poverty again, you may rely upon receiving succour from my hand. And now farewell.'—This was a hint for me to take my departure at once; and I can assure you, my dear Constance, that I had no inclination to remain—for I already began not merely to loathe myself, but likewise all who were con-

nected with the transaction."

The Marquis of Villebelle ceased; and Constance Farefield sat gazing upon him with looks of mingled commiseration and uncertainty. She pitied him for all he had gone through—she could scarcely blame him for the step he had taken, under such peculiar circumstances, in order to save himself from the horrors of poverty and the dismal alternative of suicide: but she was bewildered how she herself could thenceforth act towards him. Suddenly a recollection flashed to her mind, bringing hope along with it; and she said in an excited tone, "But did you not tell me ere now that you would be almost justified in declaring yourself to be unmarried? What meant you by that averment? what did it signify? what am I to understand? Speak, speak, Etienne! You know not what torturing suspense I at this moment endure: for all my happiness hangs upon the next word that may fall from your lips!"

"I will soon explain myself, dear Constance," replied the Marquis, his countenance brightening up somewhat, or at all events losing a portion of the melancholy cloud which had been hanging upon it. "But ere I make known the meaning of those words which I spoke just now, and of which you have reminded me it is necessary I should enter into a few more particulars respecting myself. For you must not think, Constance, that the large sum of money which I received in such a manner and for such a service, made me happy. No, no—far from it! It was the utter desperation of my circumstances which induced me to render that service and take the reward. Heaven knows that by nature I am not mean, nor mercenary, nor dishonourable. Nothing of the reckless adventurer is there in my character! I was the creature of circumstances: it was an imperious necessity that ruled me. But when it was all over, I felt as if I had committed a crime and done a dishonourable action; and within twenty-four hours of that solemn mockery which gave me a wife and her dower, but deprived me of the former and made me unhappy with the latter. I sped to the hotel to return the money and insist upon ~~steps~~^{steps} being taken for the annulment of the marriage. But the Englishman and his companions had gone! In order to banish the

unpleasant reflections which now haunted me by day and by night, I embarked in commercial speculations, not so much in the hope of increasing my means as of amusing my mind. For three or four years they progressed favourably enough: but at length a sudden panic paralysed all my schemes, and the failure of a bank threatened me with ruin. Day and night did I toil to disentangle my affairs from the vortex of difficulty and embarrassment in which they were plunged; and I succeeded so far that I paid my liabilities with honourable exactitude, and found a surplus of a few hundreds of pounds remaining for my own use. Sick of commercial pursuits and financial speculations, I came over to England. Then was it, dearest Constance, that I became acquainted with you; and as to know you is to love you, I learnt to love you fondly! Oh, I need not tell you over again how deeply I love you! That I was wrong, cruelly situated as I am, to whisper the tale of love in your ears, there can be no doubt: but this love which I entertain for you became indispensable to my happiness—it gave me a new existence—and it seemed to promise felicity for the future. Could I resign it?—could I abandon this dream of bliss? Besides, during the interval which had then elapsed since my marriage—that fatal, that cursed marriage—I had never seen my wife—never heard of her—could not even learn what had become of her—and had never even caught the faintest whisper to the effect that there was a being in the world bearing the name of the Marchioness of Villebelle. Secretly did I prosecute inquiries in London to ascertain if such a lady were known in the circles of fashion: but to my joy I could hear of nothing of the sort. I inquired also after that Englishman, whose name I dare not mention: for I resolved if I could hear of him, to seek him out and ascertain if my wife were still alive. All I could however learn was that the individual alluded to was on the Continent, but that his whereabouts was not known. I therefore naturally concluded that some fresh circumstances had transpired to induce the lady to discard the name and title she had obtained by her marriage with me; and it was under this belief, sweet Constance, that I ventured to breathe my tale of love and whisper my hopes in your ears. Am I so deeply to blame? Oh! if you had been

less beautiful, less fascinating, less fond, less affectionate, I might have yielded to the calmness of reflection—I might have bowed to a sense of duty—I might have smothered this passion of mine when it was as yet a nascent flame. But I adored you—I adore you still—I shall adore you ever, even though at the expiration of this interview we part to meet no more!"

"But the meaning of those words, Etienne?" murmured Constance, profoundly moved, and her heart fluttering with hope and suspense: "tell me, tell me, what did they signify? For I see that there is yet something left untold—something that warranted you to declare that you would not be altogether unjustified in representing yourself as a single man?"

"To that explanation I now come," responded the Marquis, whose arm had once more encircled Miss Farfield's waist, and from which she did not withdraw. "Within the last three weeks I met her whom I have been compelled to regard and to speak of as my wife—"

"Ah! then you know that she is alive? and you have seen her?" exclaimed Constance, in accents expressive of disappointment and sorrow.

"Yes—I have seen her; and when I tell you the result of our meeting you may not perhaps look thus distressed. I will not pause to explain under what circumstances it was that I met her: suffice it to say that we did thus meet three weeks ago—and our recognition was immediate and mutual. It was in the environs of London that I thus encountered her. She was elegantly dressed, and had the appearance of being in the most comfortable circumstances. It was rather in a tone of raillery and a kind of good-humoured jocularity that she spoke. I asked her if she had ever borne my name in the presence of the world? and she assured me she had not. I next asked her if she considered she had any claim upon me as a husband? to which she likewise answered in the negative—'Now, understand me,' she said; 'I do not wish to interfere with you, and I presume that you do not intend to interfere with me. The necessity which compelled me to marry you was of a transient character: the purpose was served on the instant; and if we could now unmarry ourselves I should be

full willing?—These words sent a thrill of joy to my heart. She observed my emotion, and went on to say, 'Although we are such strangers to each other, and although I consequently know so little of you, yet you may rest assured that what trifling amount of feeling I do experience in the matter, is rather of a friendly character than otherwise; and I think by your manner there is something you would wish at my hands. If so, speak; and hesitate not. Do you want money?'—I at once interrupted her with the assurance that I entertained no such mean and mercenary idea; and I then very frankly proceeded to inform her that I was enamoured of a young lady with whose love I was blessed in return—that I had not dared reveal to her the circumstances of my wedded condition—but that if it were possible to procure and destroy the evidences of that marriage, the boon conferred upon me would be immense. Hereupon my wife at once promised to relieve my mind in this respect. She told me that she was in possession of the marriage-certificate, together with certain documents testifying to the authenticity of that certificate, and signed by those who witnessed the bridal. All these papers she frankly offered to place in my hands so that I might do with them as I chose. You may conceive, Constance, with that joy and gratitude I accepted this offer. She accordingly made an appointment for me to receive the paper; and she promised that they should be faithfully remitted to me on the day, at the hour, and at the place named. We then parted, as mere acquaintances, in the same way that we had just met, our interview having lasted but for a few minutes, and the whole conversation being confined to the topics which I have mentioned. We did not even shake hands, nor make any inquiry into each other's circumstances, beyond the one question which my wife put to me whether I was in want of money. I have now nothing more to say, unless it be to add that the appointment was faithfully kept by an emissary from my wife, and the papers were all placed in my hand. I have them at my residence—I have not destroyed them—and were it not for my oath's sake, I would show them to you, dear, Constance. But I dare not reveal names which appear in the marriage-certificate and the other documents. Now, save and except

the entry in the register at the British Ambassador's chapel in Paris, no evidence could possibly be produced—unless indeed by my own hand—to prove that I was ever wedded to another. Finally, I will ask you, Constance, whether under all these circumstances—especially the last—I should not have been almost justified in representing myself as single and unmarried?"

Constance gave no immediate answer: she reflected profoundly. What course was she to pursue? That she might in all safety become the wife of the Marquis of Villebelle without having her right to that name ever disputed, seemed beyond the possibility of doubt: but on the other hand, could she look upon herself as the legitimate and lawful wife of this nobleman who had been wedded to another? Again, on the favourable side, it was scarcely to be supposed that the English law would recognize a marriage such as that which the Marquis had been so mysteriously led into; inasmuch as it had never been consummated, and appeared on the very face of it a mockery too scandalous to be regarded in the light of a grave solemnity. And on this same favourable side, too, was the young lady's love for the French nobleman; so that after a few minutes's deliberation the arguments on *this* side proved the weightier; and extending her fair hand to the Marquis, she exclaimed, "No, Etienne, I cannot separate from you! I cannot resign this dream of bliss! I love you—and in the world's despite will I love you on unto the end."

The Marquis strained her to his breast—covered her lips and her cheeks with kisses—lavished upon her the tenderest epithets—and breathed the most solemn protestations, and pledges in her ears.

"And now, dearest," he said, "you will not refuse to be mine so soon as I shall have obtained the means of guaranteeing an adequate maintenance? At the beginning of this conversation, I informed you that a change in the French Ministry had given power to an individual who has influence enough to compel the King to do me justice, though so tardily; and in a short time I may expect a diplomatic situation. Then—"

"Yes—then," murmured Constance, "I will become thine!"

Again were there caressings, and

embracings, and the breathing of tender vows; and the two lovers experienced, if possible, a greater amount of happiness, or at all events of satisfaction and content, in consequence of the explanations which had taken place on this memorable occasion.

"Now, dearest Constance," said the Marquis, "you shall play me one of those beautiful airs which carry such ineffable bliss in unto my heart when the music is made by your fair fingers. You have your guitar with you—and I am sure that I shall not beseech this favour in vain?"

Constance took up the instrument and began to run her fingers over the strings, while the Marquis, rising from the seat, leant against the pedestal of a huge vase that stood close by, so that his tender gaze might embrace the entire form of that ravishing creature whom he loved so fondly and who loved him so devotedly in return. But scarcely had the beauteous Constance begun to strike the strings of her guitar, when Juliana, who in the meanwhile had gone through the ceremony of the toilet and exchanged her deshabillee for a dinner costume, came hurrying down the gravel-walk with the intimation that Lady Saxondale had returned and that she had intimated her intention of taking half-an-hour's ramble in the garden before dinner.

The Marquis snatched a hasty embrace from his adored one; and hurriedly shaking hands with her sister, he made good his retreat by the side-door of the garden.

CHAPTER XXX.

FLORINA.

WE must now return to Lady Florina Staunton, whom we left at the moment when scarcely able to subdue a violent outburst of her anguish, she sought the window-recess with the seeming pretext of beholding the departure of Lady Saxondale's splendid equipage, but in reality for the purpose of hiding her tears. Lady Macdonald, not for an instant suspecting that every syllable Lady Saxondale had uttered was a dagger plunged deep down into the heart of her niece, began commenting in the bitterest manner upon the presumed insolence

of William Deveril; and thus each word spoken by the aunt produced a fresh pang in the bosom of the gentle Florina. Still however did the unhappy young lady remain in the room: for she was afraid that by a too precipitate retreat she would excite Lady Macdonald's suspicion. It was an exeruclation well-nigh intolerable which Florina thus suffered—or rather a series of exeruclations more poignant than any that had ever previously entered into her young heart's experience.

Presently, after having delivered herself of an immensely long tirade of invectives against the young artist, Lady Macdonald rang the bell furiously; and when a footman answered the summons, she said, "When Mr. Deveril calls at the house again, you will tell him that his services can be dispensed with for the future, and that if he will send in his account a cheque shall be remitted for the sum."

"Yes, my lady," was the footman's reply: and he quitted the room.

Florina felt as if her heart must burst. She could endure the state of inward torture no longer; and quitting the drawing-room, she hastened up to her own chamber, where she threw herself upon the couch and gave vent to her woes in a torrent of the bitterest weeping. Long, Oh! far too long, poor girl, was that paroxysm of almost mortal anguish,—an anguish proportionate to the love which she experienced for Deveril—and that love itself was illimitable! When the violence of her emotions had somewhat exhausted itself and she began to feel that she was capable of serious reflection, she rose from the couch on which she had flung herself in her despair, and taking her seat on a sofa, endeavoured to reflect upon all that had occurred.

She could not altogether believe Lady Saxondale's story; and yet she could not altogether doubt it. She fancied that there must be some foundation for it; but that her ladyship, either in her vanity or her anger, had exaggerated many of the details. Deeply and devotedly as Florina loved William Deveril, and dreadful as it was to put faith in a narrative so dammatory to his sincerity, yet the young lady, inexperienced as she was in the ways of the world, could not possibly imagine that it was all false, and that instead of a wanton inconstancy being imputed to Deveril,

it was a sheer wickedness that lay at the door of Lady Saxondale. But though unable to believe in Deveril's complete innocence, Florina was not prepared to break off with him entirely without previously giving him an opportunity of explanation—or justification, if possible. There was still far too much confidence in her love not to induce her to adopt this course; and though tortured by horrible doubts as she was, there was likewise too much justice in her heart to permit the young damsel to condemn her lover upon that purely one-sided statement.

"And yet," she thought within herself, "what could he possibly say in his defence? There surely must be some foundation for Lady Saxondale's statements; and if that foundation be ever so slight, it is nevertheless sufficient to form a colossal monument of Deveril's perfidy towards me. Oh! who would have thought that when yesterday he knelt at my feet and poured forth the impassioned language of love, he could so soon repeat the tale elsewhere! It seems impossible! it seems impossible! Not merely is love outraged, but every idea of propriety—and even nature itself! It cannot be true! No—Deveril is incapable of such conduct. It would stamp him as false-hearted, vile, profligate—And, Oh! who could believe him to be all this? But Lady Saxondale—would *she* invent such a story? For what purpose? Surely not to gratify her vanity? She who has had nobles falling at her feet and soliciting her hand, needs not to vaunt the admiring homage of an humble artist, especially if that homage were never offered at all. But if not from vanity, was it wickedness? No, no—Lady Saxondale is incapable of that. A worldly-minded woman she is; but not so thoroughly black-hearted. Oh! I am tortured with suspense—I am racked with uncertainty. Would to heaven that I had never known William Deveril at all—or at least, that I had never loved him!"

Again did Florina's tears flow thick and fast; and her bosom was convulsed with sobs.

"Oh! if he were really innocent after all," she continued in her musings, "what a frightful indignity is this which my aunt has ordered to be put upon him! To have the door shut in his face—to be told to send in his bill like any tradesman who is discarded for insolence or some other fault—good heavens! if Deveril be innocent, I say, how keenly, how deeply will he feel

this insult! And this is not all. His character will be ruined—Lady Saxondale is spreading the story—Oh! she would not dare do this unless she had just ground!—no, she would not dare do it—it is too serious—and I fear—Oh! I fear, that Deveril is indeed false. Ah, why have I loved him? There is not a book I ever read and in which love is introduced, that it is not represented as enduring the severest trials. Why does every poet depict love as being thus tortured? why does every novelist describe its current as never flowing smoothly! Because the poet and the novelist draw their inspirations from the facts passing in the great world before their eyes; and therefore it is the truth which they delineate. Oh! then this truth—this grand, striking, and imperious truth, is that love must have its trials, its sorrows, and its disappointments—aye, and that the rose of love is too often doomed to wither prematurely and perish before its time! Alas! would that I had never allowed the rose of love to shed its fragrance upon my soul: it is a fragrance which a blight turns into a plague-mist, and which instils poison where it at first appeared to be only capable of shedding sweets!"

In this manner mused the unhappy Florina Staunton, till at length her ideas reached a pitch so torturing, so intolerable, that she felt she must do something in order to put an end to this state of mind. She must know the truth at once; to live tossed upon the waves of uncertainty, were an existence which she could not endure. If Deveril had been guilty of all that Lady Saxondale imputed to him, the sooner Florina knew the worst the better: she could then summon all her fortitude to her aid, and endeavour to stifle her love in her heart. But if on the other hand William Deveril were innocent—if through misapprehension of his meaning at the time, or if in the spirit of sheer wickedness Lady Saxondale had recited her narrative—it was of the highest consequence that Deveril should be informed of what was being said against him. Thus, in any case did Florina feel how paramount it was that she should have an interview with Deveril. But how was this to be managed? When he called at the house the door was to be shut in his face. She thought of writing

to him: but if she proposed an appointment, where could they meet? The circumstances in which the young lady found herself placed, were as difficult as they were urgent. Indeed, it was one of those positions in which a very decisive and almost desperate step could alone be taken. And such a step did Lady Florina make up her mind to adopt.

Composing her feelings as well as she was able, the young lady descended again to the drawing-room. Her object was to learn in the course of conversation what were her aunt's plans for the evening. This was soon ascertained: Lady Macdonald was engaged to a whist-party at an old dowager's in the same Square; and Florina therefore perceived with inward satisfaction that the evening would be entirely at her own disposal—for Lady Macdonald was by no means likely to require her to accompany her to an "old people's party."

Hours passed away—hours full of poignant suspense and a torturing anxiety for the poor young lady. Never had an afternoon appeared so long: never had the foot of time seemed to be so heavy. Talk of time having wings and flying fleetly! he had none *then* for Florina. By one only incident was the monotony of that afternoon relieved; and this was an incident that enhanced to a harrowing degree the young lady's affliction. It was when Deveril's well-known knock sounded at the front door, and Florina almost immediately afterwards heard that door closed with an unusual degree of violence. Good heaven! the outrage was consummated—if an outrage it were? Because if Deveril were really unfaithful and inconstant, and if Lady Saxondale's story were strictly true, then was it no unmerited outrage, but a well deserved punishment.

The dinner-hour arrived; and Lady Macdonald, who was one of those persons that dwelt long upon a particular topic and reverted often to it, talked the whole time about "the overweening inscience and laughable coxcombry of that upstart Deveril." And poor Florina was compelled to sit and listen—and not merely to listen, but also to veil the feelings which this constant harping on the same sensitive chord tried so cruelly. Yes—she had to conceal her emotions from her aunt, and from the domestics in attendance; but as she caught herself blushing and

turning pale a dozen times in a minute, she trembled to the lowest confines of her being at the fear of being detected. That dinner was one of the cruellest ordeals through which she had ever passed; and never was relief more gratefully welcomed than when Lady Macdonald retired to dress for the whist-party, and Florina thus found an opportunity of seeking the solitude of her own chamber.

Unlike the Hon. Miss Farefields, Lady Florina Staunton had no *confidential* lady's-maids. She had two lady's-maids: but with neither of them was she accustomed to converse in a manner calculated to lessen her own dignity in their eyes, or diminish the respect which they experienced towards her. For, considering the sphere to which she belonged, Lady Florina was assuredly one of the most artless, unsophisticated, and ingenuous creatures in existence. Therefore, while she invariably treated her dependants with the utmost affability and kindness, never even making them feel their menial condition, she at the same time avoided anything that savoured of undue familiarity. Whatsoever secrets her heart might cherish, were treasured up in the sanctity of that chaste tabernacle; and thus was it the Lady Florina had no confidante in the general acceptance of the term.

The consequence was that she now felt herself involved in a perplexing and embarrassing position. She was anxious to go out for a couple of hours; and she did not choose the household to be aware of the circumstance. How was she to manage? Though in the purity of her heart hating and scorning anything that bordered upon duplicity, she now found herself reduced to the necessity of scheming somewhat in order to accomplish her purpose. After a little deliberation, the young lady decided how to act. She waited till her aunt had taken her departure to the house where she was to spend the evening; and then Florina rang the bell of her own private chamber. Her principal lady's-maid, whose name was Sophia, immediately answered the summons; and Florina said, "I feel so unwell this evening that I mean to lie down for an hour or two. Do not let me be disturbed until I ring for you."

Sophia, suspecting nothing, promised to obey her young mistress's orders, and withdrew. It was now close upon nine o'clock; and Florina,

putting on her plainest and simplest apparel—an unpretending straw-bonnet with a veil and a dark shawl—glided down a back staircase and succeeded in issuing unperceived from the house, there being a means of egress from the rear of the premises. We should add that she had locked the door of her own suite of apartments and had taken the key with her.

On foot did the young lady proceed to the Regent's Park, which for the behoof of persons unacquainted with London, we may observe is at no very great distance from Cavendish Square.

As she went on her way, Florina was several times on the point of turning back. She felt that in one sense there was some impropriety in the step she was taking—that of a single young lady visiting a single young gentleman, and such a visit being paid at such an hour: but then she thought to herself that after everything that had occurred on the previous day between herself and Deveril, it was a duty she owed to her own feelings as well as to those of that individual to suffer no unnecessary delay to elapse ere she had an explanation with him. If all the worst should be confirmed, he surely would not aggravate the present evil of his conduct towards her by boasting elsewhere that he had received such a visit: and if he were enabled to defend himself completely against the allegations of Lady Saxondale, he would rejoice and be grateful for the step Florina was now taking. Thus the young lady found more arguments to induce her to continue her way than to make her retrace her steps.

She entered the Regent's Park, and in a short time drew near the mansion where she had passed the previous evening. She stood for a few moments gazing up at the balcony whence she had waved her handkerchief to Deveril: and as her heart swelled almost to bursting and the tears started from her eyes, she said to herself, "Is it possible that within a few hours after making a declaration of love to Lady Saxondale, he could have been guilty of such a hollow hypocrisy as to seek this spot in the hope of being enabled to catch a glimpse of me? Ah! there is a strange, an unnatural contradiction in all this; and the longer I think of it, the more irresistibly am I led towards the conviction that William is true to me, and that Lady Saxondale has either been grievously mistaken or guilty of a

wilful misrepresentation."

Inspired by these thoughts, and cheered with the fervid hope that they would soon receive the fullest confirmation, Florina pursued her way in the direction of the pretty little villa where William Deveril dwelt. For during their conversation on the preceding day he had informed her of the place of his private abode; and as she was well acquainted with all the environs of the fashionable neighbourhood of the Regent's Park, she had no difficulty in finding her way to the young artist's dwelling.

It was a small but neat and genteel residence, situated in a somewhat secluded spot, beyond the boundary of the Regent's Park, and presenting a very picturesque appearance. As she came in sight of the villa, Florina felt her heart beat with quickening palpitations; and on reaching the iron railings which enclosed the front garden, she was again seized with an access of hesitation and uncertainty whether to proceed. But she had come thus far—she had reached the place of destination—she had passed through the loneliness of the Park—and should she now retreat at the very last moment? should she tremble at the accomplishment of her purpose? No: her mind was speedily made up again: she opened the garden gate, and threading the gravel-walk which was embowered in evergreens she advanced up to the front door. It stood open—for the evening was close and sultry: a lamp burnt in the hall, but there were no lights in the front-parlour on the ground floor. The casement of this room was open, and voices issuing from within, reached Florina's ears. One of those voices was Deveril's—the other was that of a female; and the very first sounds which the young lady caught struck her as laden with accents of tenderness and enfearement.

A sickening sensation seized upon her—the demon of jealousy again raised its voice in the depths of her soul—she felt as if she were standing on the threshold of a revelation that was to bring a blight upon her heart. Transfixed to the spot, she stood—unable to lift her hand to touch the bell or the knocker of the door—unable also to advance a step to pass that open portal—unable likewise to make known her presence in any shape or way. She was thus deprived of the power either to advance or retreat. Instinctively did she listen: she could not help it, no matter what

amount of impropriety characterized her conduct—no matter how indiscreet a part she was playing. Of all this she thought not:—it struck her not that she was doing wrong—indeed she was incapable of serious or deliberate reflection of any kind. Those sounds of voices which she had caught had struck her, we said, as being laden with an unmistakable tenderness; but the words themselves had not reached her ears. Now she listened with suspended breath to catch what was being said, as if her whole life's happiness or misery depended upon the result.

"But, my dearest William," murmured the female voice which she had already heard, and whose tones were of silvery softness; "you must tell me what has occurred, for you know how sincerely I love."

"Wherefore,"—and it was now the voice of Deveril that was speaking—"wherefore will you thus insist that I am dull and melancholy?"

"Oh! because, my beloved William—" and the remainder of the sentence was breathed in so low a tone that the sense of the words was lost to the listening Florina.

"My sweet girl, do not shed tears on my account," said Deveril, in the most soothing and endearing accents. "Come, I must not see you mournful and melancholy like this. While we have been sitting in conversation here the darkness has gathered around us—the twilight has gone—dusk has succeeded. Shall we ring for lights or ramble in the garden for half an hour?"

"Whichever you please, dear William," responded that soft and silvery female voice. "Oh! how your brows throb! There, let me push back your hair, dear William, from over your forehead. Ah! I am sure that you have experienced annoyances this day. Your hand is hot and feverish. Let me kiss your cheek. Ah! that is burning too! Come, dear William—we will walk in the garden a little, for the air in this room is hot and stifling."

All this while Florina was still transfixed to the spot, a prey to the most torturing sensations. Who could this female be? That she was young, the silver melody of her voice sufficiently proved: that she was beautiful, Florina's jealousy naturally prompted. But, Ah! a sudden hope flashed to the young lady's mind. Might not this

female be Deveril's sister? And yet no: for he had never spoken of a sister—and if he possessed one, surely he would have alluded to her in the long and familiar conversation which he and Florina had held on the previous day? No,—no she could not be his sister! Then who was she? Oh! for a jealous heart to ask itself that question, what possible answer could be returned? what response could the fevered imagination suggest? The hope which had sprung up an instant back was annihilated immediately—almost as soon as it was formed; and poor Florina felt as if she must scream out in frenzy, or sink down in senselessness.

But they were coming forth to walk in the garden—William Deveril and his female companion. Florina must retreat—she must vanish from the scene where she felt convinced that she had a rival in the young artist's love. But, ah! her feet are still nailed to the spot—she could not stir—it was a terrible crisis in her thoughts and sensations—and if her very life depended upon it, she could not at that instant have moved a limb. Suddenly the parlour door opened and Deveril came forth with his female companion into the hall. His arm was thrown round her waist and her fair hand lay lovingly upon his shoulder. But, heavens! who was the beauteous creature that thus, half-locked in William Deveril's fond embrace, met the view of the dismayed and anguished Florina?

It was Angela Vivaldi, the Opera dancer!

A wild cry thrilled from Florina's lips—the spell which had retained her transfixed statue-like to the spot, was suddenly lifted—and as if seized with a mortal terror, she fled precipitately.

"Who is it? what does this mean?" exclaimed Deveril, as he rushed forward in pursuit of Florina, whom he had not recognized, because she was veiled, and because also the glimpse he had caught of her just inside the front-door in the dusk of the garden, was so partial and so brief.

But as if inspired by a panic-terror, the young lady flew away from the spot where it would have seemed pollution and contamination now to linger; and she relaxed not her speed until, exhausted and breathless, she

had regained the carriage-road inside the Regent's Park. Then, finding that she was not pursued, she flung herself on a bench and gave way to the violence of her grief.

That flood of tears relieved her so far that she now became capable of deliberate reflection; and wiping her eyes, she said aloud, "This weakness is unworthy of me. What! I bestowed my heart's purest and sincerest affection upon one who is the unworthiest, the most deceitful, as well as the most profligate of men! Good heavens, is it possible that so much perfidy and wickedness could be concentrated in one so young and apparently so ingenuous? Ah! rude indeed are the teachings of this day—bitter the experiences which within a few brief hours have shed their light upon my soul! I am older by many years in knowledge of the world, than I was when I rose from my couch this morning. But enough of those reflections. Let me behave with becoming fortitude—let me stifle this affection in my heart—let me banish his image from my mind!"

Then, as if to outstrip her harrowing thoughts Lady Florina rose from the seat and began walking hurriedly along the road through the Park; and though she felt her heart swelling as if it were about to break, and though the tears kept flowing afresh from her eyes, yet she struggled with all her strength to subdue another outburst of the grief that was thus convulsing her. Her dream of love was over—a sad and terrible change had taken place in her mind—the world's roses were all withered to her view—earth's choicest flowers were scattered, blighted and dead, in her pathway—existence stretched before her like a barren waste—and the poor girl felt that she had now naught worth living for!

It was about eleven o'clock when Florina reached the house in Cavendish Square; and she succeeded in effecting her entrance unperceived by any of the inmates. Her absence, thanks to the precaution she had taken, was not discovered; and on gaining her own apartment she really felt as she had described herself to her lady's maid two hours back—namely, exceedingly unwell.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A NIGHT ADVENTURE.

IT was about twelve o'clock on the same night of which we have been writing in the previous chapter, that Chiffin—the Cannibal emerged from the Edgeware Road, and crossing Oxford Street, entered Park Lane. But instead of immediately pursuing his way, he stopped short—looked up and down—and not perceiving the person whom he expected to meet him at that spot, he gave vent to a deep imprecation, muttering likewise, "If he don't come, I'll make him repent it the next time I meet him—hang me if I don't!"

Fearful of encountering a policeman, the Cannibal walked a little way down Park Lane, and then turned back; but when he found that the person whom he awaited did not make his appearance, a deeper and more terrible imprecation denoted the ruffian's ferocious rage.

In order to avoid attracting any inconvenient notice, his bludgeon was concealed beneath his loose shaggy coat; and he kept as much as possible in the deep shades of the place where he was now loitering. For it was a clear bright night; and moreover the street lamps in front of the mansions in Park Lane gave forth a light which rendered it all the more necessary for him to observe the utmost caution.

"Perhaps he thinks because it's a fine night, I shouldn't do the trick," muttered the Cannibal to himself; "but he's no business to have any opinion of his own in the matter. For the job of getting into a strange place without a confederate inside, and no put-up affair, I rather like a clear night. One sees better how to go to work. Some cracksmen always do their business in the dark; and though it's a good rule on most occasions, it isn't always to be followed. But here's Tony after all, blow him!"

The reader will remember a certain individual named Tony Wilkins, who belonged to the gang that infested Agar Town and made Solomon Patch's house their head-quarters. This Tony Wilkins was the person whom Lady Bess had especially chosen to be the bearer of the small sealed packet which she had ordered him to deliver to a gentleman at King's Cross; and we have described him as a young man of about four-and-twenty, clad in a

squalid garb, and with a countenance as sinister in its expression as that of any one of his wonted companions. It was this same Tony Wilkins for whom the Cannibal had been waiting, and who now at length made his appearance.

"Well, what the deuce has made you so late?" said Chiffin in a growling tone.

"Late! it's on'y just midnight," was the response; "and you told me as how I was to be here as the clocks was a-striklog twelve—didn't yer?"

"They have struck twelve at least ten minutes ago," returned the Cannibal.

"Well, ten minutes more or less," observed Wilkins, "isn't no great thing. You can't be quite so particular."

"Yes—but what was the use of keeping me trudging about here at the risk of being twigged by the blue bottles? Howsomever, we won't lose any more time. So come along."

"To tell yer the truth, Chiffin," said Tony, clutching the Cannibal by the arm, "I don't over and above like this here affair. You say you've never been inside the premises—that you don't known nuffin about'em—that you ain't got no pals amung the slaveys—"

"But I know that there's plenty of swag to be got—and so I suppose that's enough," interrupted Chiffin fiercely. "Why, here you are as down in your luck as you well can be; and here am I ready to take you by the hand and put a good thing in your way."

"All right, Chiffin!" exclaimed Tony. "If you're so deuced sure of the business I suppose it's all safe. So here goes—and I'm the man to second you, old feller."

"But I tell you what it is, Tony," growled the Cannibal, as he fixed his reptile-like gaze upon his companion, "if so be you feel afraid, say so at once, and there's an end of the matter—'cause why, I don't like dealing with cowards."

"Come, Chiffin—none of this here sort of talk with me!" exclaimed Wilkins angrily. "I'm no coward—but I don't want to run my neck hang into a noose. You know deuced well I ain't afeard—I never wor afeard of nuffin in my life. Fear and prudence is two very different things, I takes it. If so be you was to see a mad bull a-thundering along this here lane, I s'pose yer wouldn't go and grapple him by the 'orns—would yer? Not

you, indeed—you'd precious soon bolt a von side. Well then, that's prudence. But if so be he comed right up and 'tacked yer, then I knows very well you'd let fly at him with her club in a jiffey. Well, then, that's walour."

"Do hold your jaw, Tony, and come along," growled the Cannibal. "There—I'll go on in front, and you foller at a distance. Slip bang round the second turning to the left, and you'll find me a-waiting."

Having thus spoken, Chiffin the Cannibal walked rapidly on, Tony Wilkins keeping in his track, but at an interval of about fifty yards. They encountered no policemen in their way: the truth is, there very seldom are policemen to be found on their beats in that fashionable region, between the hours of eleven and one—those officials being either at some public-house which keeps open all night, or else supping cozily with the female domestics in the kitchen of some mansion where dancing and card-playing are going on up-stairs in the drawing-rooms. Thus was it that Chiffin the Cannibal and Tony Wilkins passed on unmolested, and the former halted at a side-door in a garden-wall, where he was speedily joined by his confederate.

"Now, bush—and 'tis all right!" whispered Chiffin, as he flung a rope over the wall; and the iron grapnel which was at the end of the cord caught against that part of masonry which overhung the side-door.

The rope was thus retained fast—and Tony Wilkins, being the lighter and more agile of the two, clambered up the wall by means of the rope. In a moment he disappeared on the other side, and drew both the bolts of the door while Chiffin managed the lock by means of a skeleton-key. Thus the Cannibal, who was too heavy and clumsy to climb the wall, which was a tolerably high one, obtained prompt admittance into the garden at the back of Saxondale House—for this was the mansion where the present burglary was being effected.

"All seems as quiet as a workus," whispered Tony Wilkins, as he and his leader carefully surveyed the rear of the buildings. "There isn't never a light in none of the rooms—and not so much as a mouse a-stirring."

"Let's try this door, then," said the Cannibal.

"Or that there windy—eh?" suggested Tony.

"No—the door," was Chiffin's prompt answer: for his experienced eye at once showed him, by the aid of the moonlight, that the door presented the readiest and easiest means of effecting an entry.

From a capacious pocket in the lining of his shaggy coat, he drew forth a small saw, thin as a watch-spring, keen as an array of shark's teeth, and flexible as a Castilian stiletto-blade. With a gimlet he speedily made a hole in a lower part of the door, near where he calculated the bolt must be; and thrusting the saw into the hole, he cut out a circular piece, leaving an aperture large enough to introduce his hand. He was thus enabled to feel for the bolt and draw it back—a process which was instantaneously accomplished.

The door was high, and there was nothing for Chiffin to stand on to reach the upper part of it. He accordingly made Tony Wilkins go down upon all-fours; and standing on his back, he went to work again. Another gimlet-hole was made in the higher portion of the door—the little saw, well moistened with oil, was assiduously plied again—and another circular piece of wood, large enough to afford an opening for the hand and wrist, was soon cut out. The upper bolt was thus felt for, and drawn back; and Chiffin descended from his human footstool—such a purpose Tony Wilkins having served, but not without experiencing some degree of pain in his back, as Mr. Chiffin was by no means the lightest person in the world.

The reader will now understand that the two bolts of the door were drawn back; but the door itself was locked. It was a stout door—and Chiffin dared not attempt to break it open with a crowbar, on account of the noise that would be made by such an operation. There was no key-hole visible on the exterior side; and thus he had no immediate indication of the lock *inside*. But this difficulty was speedily overcome. Again ordering Tony Wilkins to go down upon all-fours and make himself into a foot-stool, the Cannibal mounted on his back once more; and then, with a piece of string and a leaden bullet at one end he proceeded to sound for the lock, just as a sailor at sea sounds with a card and plummet to ascertain the depth of the water. Thrusting the leaden bullet through the hole that had been cut for the removal of the upper bolt, Chiffin gradually

let out the string until the bullet was stopped by the top of the lock which projected from the inner side of the door: then keeping the string tight between his finger and thumb, so as to mark how much of it had been let go through the hole, he drew it back. To measure the outside of the door from the hole downward was now the work of an instant; and thus, Chiffin discovered with the nicest exactitude the position of the lock. He next preceeded to bore with his gimlet; and having made a hole through the wood, his little flexible saw was again put into requisition. In less than a quarter of an hour he had cut completely round the lock; and the door opened to his thrust.

"Now, Tony, come gently," he said; and they entered the premises together.

All was dark within—and all was silence likewise, at least down in the lower region of the premises. A dark lantern was quickly produced from Chiffin's capacious pocket—the candle inside was lighted by means of lucifer-matches with which he was also provided—and the two burglars commenced their survey of the place. They first entered the back kitchen; and as the Cannibal pointed to the iron bars which protected the windows, he said in a whisper to his companion, "I told you as how it wouldn't do to try the game on there. The opening of a shutter would have been nothing: but those iron fences would have given harder work than you or I should have liked to try. All these kind houses have got gratings to the lower window. It isn't the first time I have broke into a house in this part of the world. But there's nothing in this back kitchen worth looking after. So come along. It's the butler's pantry we must try, mate."

With these words Chiffin led the way out of the back kitchen, and soon found a door which was fast locked, but which he immediately concluded to be the one communicating with the place he was in search of.

"Hold the light, Tony," he said; "and I'll get to work again with the tools."

This time he tried the effect of a small crowbar upon the door, which being of far lighter make than the one by which the burglars had entered the premises, seemed to warrant this mode of dealing with it. Chiffin, we need hardly say, was an accomplished hand in using the crowbar for such purposes, and made little noise in process. The door speedily yielded—a few more

efforts, and it was broken completely open. The burglars passed into the place, which, as Chiffin had anticipated, proved to be the butler's pantry. But infinite was their disappointment when after searching in every cupboards, they found no plate there.

"This is deuced provoking," growled the Cannibal in a ferocious manner.

"Cussed mean of the people of the 'ouse to take their plate up to bed with 'em," remarked Tony Wilkins. "It ain't giving a poor devil a fair chance," he added with the look of a man who fancied that he was cruelly wronged. "What's to be done now!"

"What's to be done?" echoed the Cannibal, in a voice which resembled the subdued grumblings of a hungry tiger: "why, hunt about for the swag till we find it, to be sure. And if a throat or two is to be cut in the search, what matters it?"

"Nuffin at all," responded Tony Wilkins, "Lead on, old feller. You seems to know your way as if by instinct, as they say of the 'osses."

Chiffin the Cannibal passed out of the butler's pantry, and proceeded into the front kitchen; but nothing worthy of his predatory views was found there. Thence the burglars proceeded into the servant's hall, where some four or five stray silver forks and spoons, which the butler had doubtless forgotten to count up along with the rest of the plate, were lying about.

"This is summat, at all events," observed Tony Wilkins, "It cheers one on to look after more."

"Now then, keep that cursed tongue of your's still, and pull off them great heavy boots of your'n," said Chiffin: "or else do as I do, if you have got the things to do it with."

And what was it that Chiffin the Cannibal was now doing? Nothing more nor less than drawing on a very ~~large~~ pair of lamb's-wool socks over ~~vn~~ thick and heavy lace-up boots. being done, he took a pair of ~~s~~ from his pocket—saw that each a percussion-cap ready for ser- and handing one to Tony Wil- made him only use it in case of desperation of circumstances, not to hesitate an instant.

burglars now began ascend- stairs, Chiffin walking first muffed feet, and Tony Wil- his naked ones; for the carrying his boots in his

hand—and as for stockings, his wardrobe was not extensive enough to permit him the enjoyment of such luxuries. He however hoped to improve and replenish it by the proceeds of his share of the present night's plunder.

The marble hall was reached; and from this point, the same as from the lower regions, it appeared that a profound silence reigned throughout the house—for it was now past one in the morning, the operations at the back door having absorbed at least three quarters of an hour. The parlours opening from the hall were visited by the intruders; and though they abounded in many fashionable nick-nacks, objects of *virtu*, beautiful ornaments, and the usual decorations to be found on the mantel-pieces and side-tables of apartments in the houses of the rich, there was not much in those rooms that would suit the purposes of the robbers. A few things however they did consign to their pockets; and emboldened by the freedom from interruption and the absence of all alarm which they thus experienced, they began the ascent of the magnificent marble staircase leading to the drawing-rooms and state-apartments. In the first of these which they entered, they found a gold watch lying upon the table; and there were many little ornaments scattered about which they knew Solomon Patch would purchase, and to which they therefore freely helped themselves. Thence they passed into the adjacent room; but as they entered it with as much caution as possible, they stopped suddenly short on beholding a light at the farther extremity. It shone through a door which stood half open at the end of the large apartment they had just entered.

The burglars stopped short, we say; and Chiffin instantaneously closed the blind of his dark lantern. But the two men did not retreat; they stood and listened with breathless attention. If they had heard voices in conversation they would have held it time enough to make the best of their way from the premises; but if they heard no voices, they would then be encouraged to traverse the room which they had entered and see who was in the next one, in which case they might be enabled by threats or violence to compel any person whom they would thus find to give information relative

to the whereabouts of the plate, jewel, money, &c. Such were the thoughts that simultaneously occurred to the two burglars: for all men of that class act as it were upon a particular system, and pursue a course which is as much guided by previous experiences as by the occurrences which transpire at the moment.

For several minutes did they listen—and they heard no one speak. Then they traversed the spacious apartment with as much caution as possible; and the thick carpet would have stifled the sound of their footsteps even if the feet of one had not been muffled and the boots of the other taken off. On reaching the door which stood half open, Chiffin peeped in, and beheld a lady seated alone in the adjacent room. She was placed at a table and had a book open before her: but she was not reading—she was reclining back in her chair—and as the light of the wax candles fell with a sort of Rembrandt effect upon her splendid features, it was easy to perceive that she was absorbed in a profound reverie. Nor were her reflections of the most pleasing description: for there was a lowering of the naturally high and noble forehead—there was a sinister light gleaming in the eyes to which so magnificent a lustre properly belonged—and there was a compression of the lips which nature had never intended to remain so firmly closed.

This lady was none other than the mistress of the mansion; and Chiffin knew her to be Lady Saxondale. He had seen her first upwards of nineteen years back, when, being despatched by Ralph Farofield into Lincolnshire, he had lurked about the neighbourhood of Saxondale Castle watching for an opportunity to carry off the child: he had seen her then, in the pride and glory of her youthful beauty—and once seen, she was not a woman who could be easily forgotten. But Chiffin had also seen her within the last few days: for he had loitered about Saxondale House in Park Lane, not only with the view of discovering as much as he could of the position of the premises, but also to examine the features of the domestics and see whether the physiognomy of any one of them furnished a sufficient indication of innate villainy to warrant the Cannibal in scraping acquaintance with the view to an arrangement for a burglary. In this hope he had been disappointed: but while thus loitering

about, he had seen Lady Saxondale go in and out of the mansion—he had recognised her as the same beautiful woman he had seen in Lincolnshire nearly twenty years back—and thus was it that he at once knew her now, as peeping through that half-opened door he beheld her seated in a mood of deep abstraction at the table.

A glance rapidly flung round the room where Lady Saxondale was thus observed, at once showed the Cannibal not merely that she was alone, but likewise that there was no other door open by which any sudden cry of alarm to which she might give vent would issue forth. He therefore resolved upon taking a desperate step in order to reap a handsome harvest from his present enterprise; and making a sign for Tony Wilkins to stop where he was for the instant, the Cannibal passed stealthily into the room.

So deep was Lady Saxondale's abstraction, that she perceived him not. Her looks were fixed on the book which lay open before her: but she saw not the pages themselves—all her faculty of vision was as it were turned *inward* with the absorbing nature of her meditations. For Lady Saxondale had this night experienced no inclination to retire to rest. The image of William Deveril appeared to haunt her. She loved him—and she hated him at one and the same time. She feared that she had taken a false step and compromised herself seriously, in having made the round of all her acquaintances and friends during the day and promulgated her story relative to that young man. Cunningly devised as the tale was, she trembled lest the refutation which Deveril would give when it reached his ears, might obtain credit; and thus though great was the satisfaction she had experienced at the time, not only in torturing Lucy Florina, but likewise in propagating the same scandal elsewhere, she was now apprehensive that the blow she had endeavoured to deal might rebound upon herself. In short, her feelings having been unnaturally excited during the day, had since experienced a proportionate reaction; and conscience, which "makes cowards of us all," was not permitting Lucy Saxondale to be an exception to that rule.

Besides, she was not only fearful that the tangled web she had been thus weaving, would in the long run enmesh herself; but she was tortured with the pangs of jealousy towards Lucy Florina. What was she to do in re-

spect to her whom she thus regarded as her rival? Even apart from that hatred which the spirit of jealousy had suddenly made her experience for Florina, how could she possibly permit the engagement to continue between her son and that young lady?—and yet, on the other hand, upon what pretext could she break off the engagement? Altogether, Lady Saxondale's position was one of apprehension, bewilderment, torture, and perplexity: and in addition to the circumstances connected with Deveril and Florina which had thus combined to make her wretched, there were *others* which struck their viper stings into her heart.

This is not however the time nor place to analyse at any great length the feelings and thoughts of Lady Saxondale. The little which we have just said upon this subject, was merely for the purpose of accounting for why she had not as yet sought her couch, and wherefore we find her seated alone in that abstracted mood and at so late an hour of the night—or rather at so early a period of the morning. In the depth of her disagreeable meditations it was no wonder that she observed not the presence of Chiffin the Cannibal; and as he, by making a short circuit in the room, was enabled to steal as it were close up behind her before she was aware of the intrusion, it was with a sudden start and a horrible access of terror that she felt a hand suddenly laid upon her shoulder.

Wildly she sprang up; and on beholding herself confronted by that hideous-looking wretch, a scream was about to burst from her lips: but it was stifled ere it broke forth, by the suddenness with which the Cannibal exclaimed, "Silence, or you are a dead woman!"—and a pistol, gleaming in his hand, was presented close to her forehead.

For an instant Lady Saxondale was paralysed with terror: but her naturally strong mind almost immediately regained its self-possession—and she said in a voice that was strangely calm under such circumstances, "Remove that weapon: I will not create an alarm."

Tony Wilkins now made his appearance: and Lady Saxondale, perceiving that there were two ruffians, and thinking it quite probable that there might be even more, felt that anything like resistance would be altogether vain, and that if she attempted to raise the household her life would be inevit-

ably forfeited. For it was impossible to glance even for a single instant at Chiffin the Cannibal's countenance without reading in its hideous lineaments the most blood-thirsty propensities and a brutal capacity for mischief.

"Well," he said, pointing the muzzle of his pistol downwards, but not putting it away from her sight, "you seem an uncommon brave lady; and so I suppose you are just as prudent a one. Therefore we shall have no nonsense in dealing with you."

"What do you require?" asked Lady Saxondale. "But that question I need scarcely put: your looks bespeak your errand. You see I treat the matter with frankness; and therefore there is no need to keep that weapon in your hand in so threatening a manner."

"How uncommon nice *who* speaks, don't she?" said Tony Wilkins in an under-tone as he sidled up to his companion.

"'Cause she's a lady of sense and knows what's what," observed Chiffin aloud. "Now, ma'am, please to tell us which would be most convenient—to let us walk off with the plate and jewellery, or for you to pay us over such a handsome sum that we shall go away happy and contented with our night's work, and be able to drink your ladyship's health every day for the next six months?"

"Finding myself completely in your power," returned Lady Saxondale, at the same instant flinging a quick and scarcely perceptible glance towards the mantel-piece, as if looking for some object, "I should prefer giving you a sum of money. But I must tell you beforehand, that I have not much in the shape of gold about my person, and should have to go to my own chamber to fetch the amount that you may require."

"And how much," demanded Chiffin, "may your lordship happen to have in your own chamber?"

"Perhaps four or five hundred pounds altogether," returned Lady Saxondale, after a few moments' consideration.

"That's little enough," observed Chiffin, "And, now, how much in the purse?"

Lady Saxondale, who still preserved her presence of mind with an astonishing calmness, drew forth her purse

from a reticule which hung at the back on the chair; and handing it to Chiffin, said, "Count its contents for yourself."

"Eleven sovereigns, two ten-pound notes, one five, and some silver," said the Cannibal, as he emptied the contents of the purse into his hand. "Well, but all this is a poor lot. The family plate must be worth ten times as much. What's to prevent us cutting your throat, ma'am and then ransacking the place for yourselves?"

"The plate is in the butler's own room," was Lady Saxondale's calm and collected response. "He sleeps in the same corridor with the other male domestics of the household. His door is no doubt locked: and if you attempted to force it, an alarm would be raised. A dozen men-servants, most of them for a certainty possessing loaded weapons, would be upon you."

"Her ladyship speaks like a book," whispered Tony Wilkins, "Take the blunt; it will be a deuced good night's work."

The Cannibal slightly turned his head towards his companion to hear what he had to say; and during the few brief moments his eyes were thus averted from Lady Saxondale, she again swept her own glances with lightning quickness towards the mantel-piece; and a scarcely perceptible gleam which flitted over her countenance might be regarded as an indication that she had discovered the object for which she had twice searched. The lady's swooping glance was so rapid, and that gleam on the features was so transient, that it was a wonder Chiffin observed either. But he *did*, nevertheless: for on completely turning his looks again towards Lady Saxondale, he glanced at her from the corners of his eyes; for there was altogether something in her calm self-possession, in her fortitude and coolness, which had made him suspect that she was contemplating some stratagem to effect a turning of the tables against himself and companion.

"Well, ma'am," he said with no alteration in his own voice, look or manner, "me and my pal is agreed to take the blunt—or saving your presence, the money—and we mean to be satisfied. But of course we can't let you go by yourself to your own room; 'cause why, it's certain sure you would come back with a posse of servants at your heels."

"I did not for an instant suppose," rejoined her ladyship, "that you would trust me out of your sight. My chamber is at no great distance hence,

and easily accessible. One of you can proceed thither."

"Well, that looks reasonable enough" remarked Chiffin; "because one of us will in that case stay to keep guard upon you. I say," he continued, turning towards his companion, "you shall act the part of sentinel. Here, take my clasp-knife—hold it open in one hand—and keep the pistol in t'other. Don't be afraid to use'em if need be. Keep your eye on her ladyship's face the whole time—it's a pleasant face to look at—and if you see the least inclination on her part to cry out, don't hesitate to give her a knock over the head with the butt-end of the pistol, or slit her windpipe with the cold steel."

"Trust to me," replied Tony Wilkins, as he received from the hand of his companion the clasp-knife which this latter produced from the capacious pocket of his shaggy coat.

For an instant—and only for an instant—did Lady Saxondale seem to quiver with a cold shuddering at the horrible instructions which Chiffin thus gave his companion, and which instruction he purposely elaborated in this cold-blooded manner in order to convince Lady Saxondale that it was no child's play and that any trickery on her part would cost her her life.

"Now, ma'am," continued the Cannibal, "if you'll just be so good as to give me all necessary directions, I'll take the liberty of proceeding to your ladyship's chamber. But mind, I warn you beforehand, that if you think of throwing me in the way of any of your flunkies, or sending me into an ambush. I'll plant a bullet through the brains of the first that dares to lay a hand upon me. And mind you, if my friend here, who is going to act the part of sentinel, hears my pistol fired in any other part of the house, he'll instantly fire his own; and it'll be to settle your ladyship on the spot. For look you, ma'am, if we're nabbed we may just as well swing for half-a-dozen things as for one or two."

"You might have spared all these threats," remarked Lady Saxondale, still with an extraordinary coolness and presence of mind; "because I feel that I am powerless in your hands. As a matter of course if I were able, I should frustrate your designs: but I repeat, I am powerless—and therefore

I am making the best of the matter and effecting a compromise with you."

"Go on, then, with the directions which you were going to give," said Chiffin: "for there has already been enough time wasted."

"You must issue forth by that door," said Lady Saxondale, pointing to one at the farther extremity from that by which the burglars had entered the room: "you will then find yourself upon a landing with a staircase before you. Ascend that staircase, and the first door on the right hand opens into my private chamber. This key," continued Lady Saxondale, indicating one upon a bunch of five or six, "opens a chest of drawers in that chamber; and in the second drawer from the top you will find the money of which I have spoken, lying loose in one corner. I have nothing more to say."

All the while she was thus speaking Chiffin the Cannibal fixed his eyes keenly upon Lady Saxondale's countenance: but he saw nothing therein to confirm the suspicions which had been excited in his mind. He therefore resolved to run the risk of the adventure: for though he had appeared to grumble at what he pretended to regard as the small amount of money which was forthcoming, he was secretly pleased at the idea of obtaining such a sum, in as much as a booty in the shape of ready cash rendered him independent of old Solomon Patch; and moreover it was a very dangerous experiment to pass through the streets of London with a large quantity of plate in the possession of a suspicious-looking individual.

"I suppose there's no light where I am going," he observed; "and therefore I'd better take one of them wax-candles."

"Yes—you had better," returned Lady Saxondale."

"But I say though," observed Chiffin, again hesitating as a sudden idea struck him, "suppose any of your ladyships's maids was about—which is more than likely, as you yourself are sitting up—"

"I dismissed them to their chambers long ago," returned Lady Saxondale; "and I do not think you incur the slightest risk of encountering a soul."

"If I do, ma'am," rejoined Chiffin with a terrible scowl of his hideous features and a savage glare of his rapile-eyes, "it will be the worst for you. Now, mate," he added, to his

companion, "keep a sharp look-out on her ladyship: and if you hear any suspicious noise you'll know what to do."

Having thus spoken, Chiffin the Cannibal took up by one of the wax-candles from the table, and quitted the room by the door which Lady Saxondale had indicated. But as he issued forth, he closed the door in such a manner that while it appeared to the inmates of the room to shut, he did not really allow it to do so; but he suffered it to remain about an inch ajar—and then, instead of immediately continuing his way to Lady Saxondale's private chamber, he stopped to listen, setting down the wax-candle at such a distance from the door, and in such a position that it threw no light into the room.

But why did the Cannibal adopt all these precautions? why did he remain and listen? Because, notwithstanding Lady Saxondale's countenance had remained inscrutable in its self-possession during the whole of the latter portion of the discourse, yet still Chiffin's mind was filled with doubt and misgiving. That very self-possession on her ladyship's part appeared, the longer he reflected upon it, to be but a mask for some deep treachery. In short, Chiffin fancied that she had purposely sent him on this errand with the knowledge that he would fall into some snare the nature of which he himself could not however conjecture: and that in the meantime she would endeavour to extricate herself from the custody of Tony Wilkins. He therefore resolved to listen for a few minutes; and if Lady Saxondale remained perfectly quiet and gave no indications of treachery either by word or deed, Chiffin might then in all confidence pursue his way to her chamber.

For at least a couple of minutes after he had quitted the room, Lady Saxondale remained perfectly silent as to speech and tranquil as to movement: while Tony Wilkins stood close by the chair in which she was seated, the pistol in one hand, the open clasp-knife in the other, and his eyes intently fixed upon the splendid patrician lady whom he was thus watching. Seeing everything remain thus favourable, the Cannibal was about to steal away from the door and ascend the staircase—when Lady Saxondale began to speak; so that Chiffin's feet

remained riveted to the spot, and he continued to listen with suspended breath.

"I feel such a faintness coming over me," were the words which thus began to flow from Lady Saxondale's lips, and which were addressed to Tony Wilkins, "that I must beg you to reach me that scent-bottle which stands on the mantel. It is the one with the silver top, and is next to the time-piece."

She spoke in a faint and languid voice, and appeared to be sinking back in the chair. Tony Wilkins gave no immediate answer: he hesitated how to act. At length he said, "Well, ma'am. I don't want to act harsh--leastways not cruel: but I can't part company from yer. If so be natur' isn't so much exhausted that you can drag yourself up to the chimbley-piece, I'd rayther it should be done that way, and then I could walked by your side."

"I will endeavour," murmured Lady Saxondale, still more faintly than before: and rising from her seat, she advanced slowly and with every appearance of feebleness, and tottering in her gait, towards the mantel.

Tony Wilkins kept so close to her, and held his weapons in such evident readiness to use them, that Chiffin, who observed all that was passing from the doorway, felt perfectly satisfied with the conduct of his companion: yet he was well convinced in his own mind that this was nothing but a stratagem on the lady's part for the purpose of consummating some treachery.

"Don't go too near the bell-pulls, ma'am," said Tony Wilkins, who evidently had his misgiving also: "'cause why this here clasp-knife is terribly apt to dig itself right down into an arm when stretched out to ring a bell at a time when the funkeys and slayoys isn't exactly wanted."

"I had no intention of the kind," responded Lady Saxondale: and taking the bottle from the chimney-piece, she, still with slow and tottering gait, retraced her way to her seat.

"Well," thought Chiffin to himself, "she meant no harm after all: but I suppose these fine ladies can't get on without their scent-bottles, any more than a chap like me can without his gin. But I'll just stay a minute or so longer: and then if she says nothing more, I shall consider it's all right."

Lady Saxondale resumed her seat, and sank languidly back in the chair, —Tony Wilkins still remaining close

by her side, and still preserving a vigilant watch over her. She took from the table her snowy white pocket-handkerchief, which was elaborately embroidered all along the hem and worked with a coronet in each corner. Then, still with languid movements, she unscrewed the silver top which covered the glass stopper of the bottle. We should observe that the bottle itself was a small one of the cut glass, and contained a white fluid instead of the crystallized salts usually seen in scent-bottles. Tony Wilkins naturally thought this white fluid must be some very delicious perfume: when however Lady Saxondale drew out the glass-stopper, the odour emitted by the fluid was by no means of an agreeable taste, but on the contrary, was pungent, powerful, and unpleasant. That Lady Saxondale herself entertained a similar opinion, appeared to be indicated by the circumstance that while pouring a little of this white fluid upon her pocket-handkerchief she held both handkerchief and bottle as far away from her nose as possible. Then she hastily put in the glass-stopper again, and placed the bottle on the table: but in so doing, she dropped the handkerchief.

"Pick it up for me," she said in a very faint voice: and she now looked as if she were going off in a swoon.

Tony Wilkins really and truly believed that such was the case; and while in a very guarded manner, so as not to be taken unawares, he stooped down and picked up the handkerchief, he said to himself, "I'm hanged if this is gammon: it's her nerves as does it, I suppose." He accordingly picked up the kerchief with the hand that held the pistol, and was about to present it to her ladyship, when the latter said in a tone of affable condescension. "You are welcome to smell it if you like: the perfume is of a rare character."

By a very natural and mechanical movement, Tony Wilkins applied the handkerchief to his nose: but scarcely had he done so when an overpowering sensation seized upon him with the suddenness of a lightning flash—he gave one gasp in an abortive effort to cry out—handkerchief, pistol, and clasp knife fell from his hands—and he dropped down upon the carpet as if stricken dead with apoplexy.

"Now for the alarm!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale as she sprang up from her seat.

But at the same instant she heard the sudden rush of footsteps; and

glancing round in a fright, she found herself confronted by Chiffin the Cannibal, whom she had supposed to be by that time busily engaged in plundering her bed-chamber.

The hideous rage of ten thousand demons appeared to be gathering in his infuriate looks, as he aimed a tremendous blow at Lady Saxondale with the bludgeon which he had taken from underneath his coat: but she avoided it by instinctively sinking on her knees—and stricken dumb with terror, she extended her arms in mute appeal for mercy. Had she not thus abruptly fallen down to that suppliant posture, there would have been an end of the brilliant and magnificent Lady Saxondale then and there!

"Make a noise, and by Satan! I'll do for you!" growled the Cannibal in a deep ferocious tone: and he again raised his bludgeon menacingly.

"No, no—I will not say a word," murmured Lady Saxondale, whose fortitude appeared to have all given way. "But spare my life—do not kill me—for God's sake do not kill me!"

"That all depends," was the Cannibal's brutal response. "Come, get up from your knees—but don't speak louder than a whisper, and don't move without my telling you, or I'll make devilish light work of it, you may be sure! Now then, what have you done to mate here? Is he dead?"

"No, no—not dead—only stupefied," answered Lady Saxondale. "He will come to himself again presently."

"So much the better for you," said the Cannibal. "A pretty kind of a woman you are to be able to play such a precious tricky part!"

"Was it not natural?" observed Lady Saxondale, now somewhat regaining her self-possession.

"Oh! don't bother like that," interrupted Chiffin fiercely: then, as he gazed down upon the prostrate and motionless form of Tony Wilkins, his look grew serious as if he were revolving something of importance in his mind. "By jingo, after all," he suddenly exclaimed, "I'm dounced glad this business has happened—it's given me an idea. 'Pon my soul, I'm uncommonly indebted to your ladyship! Why, robbing will become quite an easy matter, with nothing like risk in it, if so be you've told me true that this here stuff," and he pointed to the phial upon the table, "takes away the senses just by smelling it. And now, ma'am please to tell me how a person

is to be recovered?"

"The individual will presently revive naturally," answered Lady Saxondale; "and if not, by shaking him, sprinkling water on his face, and the usual means adopted in cases of swoon—"

"Oh! if that's the case, then we'll try the experiment," said Chiffin. "But mind you, ma'am, stay where you are—don't budge an inch—or—"

And without finishting the sentence, he pointed his pistol at Lady Saxondale. Then kneeling by the side of Tony Wilkins, and all the time keeping the pistol still pointed at the lady, he gently shook his prostrate companion. With a deep groan Wilkins began to revive; and in a few minutes he completely recovered his senses, though he experienced a heavy and oppressive feeling about the head.

All this while Lady Saxondale remained standing in the middle of the room, on the very spot where she had previously knelt: for the pistol continued to be levelled at her, and she had already seen enough of the desperate and determined character of Chiffin the Cannibal to be warned how she trifled with him. Unperceived by her ladyship, and while kneeling down by the side of Tony Wilkins, Chiffin gathered up the white handkerchief, which was impregnated with that powerful and stupefying essence; and sucking it partially up his sleeve and holding the remainder in his hand, so that it was altogether concealed from her ladyship's view, he rose up from his kneeling posture.

"What's all this here mean? what's been done?" asked Tony Wilkins. "I feels all no-how—"

"Nothing has been done as yet. You remain quiet and recover yourself, while I finish talking to her ladyship—"

Ladyship indeed! she's a witch," muttered Tony Wilkins angrily, "to be able to knock down a chap with a ankerchor in this here way."

"Now, ma'am," resumed Chiffin, accosting Lady Saxondale, "about this money-business. But I say!" he exclaimed with a sudden start; "whose that coming in?"

Instinctively did Lady Saxondale look round; and at the same moment the white cambric handkerchief—her own handkerchief—was thrust up to her face. The scream that rose to her lips, was stifled ere it found vent by

the sudden paralyzation of all her faculties and senses; and she dropped down upon the floor in the same way as Tony Wilkins had ere now fallen.

When Lady Saxondale became aware of returning consciousness, the glimmering of dawn stealing into the room through the curtains, was mingling with the light of the wax-tapers that had nearly burnt down to their sockets; and as her ladyship's reminiscences gradually settled themselves in her brain, she looked around in the dread anticipation of beholding the hideous forms of the burglars. But she found herself alone. Raising herself up from the carpet—but painfully and feebly, for she experienced a heaviness in the head and a languor all over her form—she threw herself upon a sofa, pressed her hand to her throbbing brows and then reviewed everything that had taken place. Raising again from the sofa, she approached the table to take a wax-light; and she observed that the bottle of powerful essence was gone. She looked on the mantel—she looked all round the room—but it was not to be seen. In the course of this survey, rapid though it was, she soon discovered that a great number of articles of value had been taken away; and now for the first time she perceived that her own person had been plundered—her rings had disappeared from her fingers—her watch, necklace, and other ornaments, had all vanished!

She now, in great trepidation and alarm hurried away from the room, and sped to the chamber of one of the lady's-maids. There she aroused the sleeping domestic with the strutting intelligence that the house had been broken into: and the other servants were speedily called up. In a few minutes all was bustle and confusion, together with no small amount of dismay. Lord Saxondale's valet was sent to his master's room to arouse him while Mary-Anne was despatched to the Miss Farefield's apartments to tell them what had happened and bid them not be frightened. In the meantime Lady Saxondale, with four or five of her female dependants repaired to her own bed chamber. The burglars had disappeared: but from the confusion which prevailed in that room, it was evident that it had been completely ransacked. All the ready money in her ladyship's drawers, amounting to about the sum she had mentioned to Chiffin—her jewellery, comprising her costly diamonds, and numerous other articles of value—had all disappeared!

We need not dwell at much greater length upon the sequel of this night's adventure. It is however necessary to record a few more particulars—and first to observe that Lord Saxondale's valet was compelled to return to his mistress and report (what indeed he had all along known) that his young master had not been in during the night. As the reader has doubtless anticipated, the burglars got clear off long before the alarm was raised: for Lady Saxondale had remained a considerable time in a state of stupefaction. Her account was, for she chose to say nothing about the essence in the bottle—that she had sat up to read a very interesting book, when she was suddenly startled by the presence of two ill-looking men, from one of whom she received a blow with a bludgeon that struck her down senseless. Such being the version she rendered, she could not for consistency's sake, give anything like a minute description of the personal appearance of the Russians.

The searching investigation that instituted throughout the house a few hours later, showed that several of the apartments had been entered and robbed of many articles of value; while the condition of the back door leading into the garden, indicated plainly enough the means by which the burglars had obtained admittance. Information was of course at once given to the police; and two experienced "detectives" were speedily on the premises. The first glance which they gave at the back door enabled them to pronounce with confidence that it was no "put-up affair;" in other words, that none of the servants of the establishment were in league with the robbers, the entry having been effected by forcible means from without, and through no succour from within. Lady Saxondale was requested to give as minute a description as she could of the burglars: but all she deemed it prudent to say was that one appeared to be a rough-looking man with a shaggy coat and a white hat with a black band, and that the other was a thin squalid individual—beyond which she could give no more satisfactory details.

But this account, meagre though it seemed, was sufficient to put the detectives on the right scent with regard to one of the burglars, whom they both

unhesitatingly pronounced to be Chiffin the Cannibal. With respect to the other, they could form no conjecture.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DR. FERNEY.

The gentleman whose name stands at the head of this chapter, was one of the most eminent but at the same time one of the most eccentric physicians in London. He occupied a very large mansion in Conduit Street, Hanover Square: yet his household establishment was on a very limited scale. Indeed, he kept only four domestics, entertained very little company, and lived in the plainest and simplest manner. But he tenanted so large a habitation because he required ample space for a museum of curiosities which he had been collecting for more than twenty years, and which consisted of objects connected with the medical, surgical, and physiological sciences. Mummies from Egyptian pyramids—human relics dug out of the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii—corpses which he had obtained from the body-snatchers and had embalmed with his own hands—the skeletons of individuals who having died in the work-houses or hospitals, presented examples of extraordinary malformation—monster-children preserved in glass bottles—figures in wax-work representing the appearance and ravages of the most virulent diseases which afflict humanity,—in short, a host of objects of this class and character were gathered in a suite of chambers at Dr. Ferney's house.

To these rooms the domestics very seldom penetrated: for it was confidently reported that the house was haunted, and that the spirits of some of the deceased persons whose embalmed bodies or fleshless skeletons found a place in the doctor's collection, were frequently seen gliding skilfully through those dismal and gloomy chambers. Not even had daylight would the housewife alone into the museum sweep away the dust: the female when this duty was to be invariably went two to-

gether, and all the time they were engaged in cleansing the place, they would keep in close companionship, as if this near contiguity could effectually guarantee them against the presence of apparitions.

And truly, the museum was no very cheerful spectacle for persons of weak nerves or timorous dispositions. The Egyptian mummies, in their manifold swathings, with their shrivelled countenances resembling baked leather, and standing upright in the coffin-like boxes with glass lids,—the modern corpses, embalmed by the doctor's own hand, wrapped in shrouds, and with their yellowish marble-looking faces, their dull, glassy eyes wide open, their teeth gleaming between the pale lips slightly apart, and having a somewhat life-like look, though hideous and ghastly, as they also stood upright in their tall narrow cells fronted with glass,—the skeletons with every bone perfect, and articulated all over, suspended against the walls in such a manner that they seemed to stand upright of their own accord, the skulls that were ranged in rows upon the shelves and seemed to look down with their eyeless sockets and to grin in mockery with their lipless mouths,—the monsters and abortions preserved in glass-bottles of different sizes, some of these monsters being children with two heads to one body, others with one head to two bodies, and so forth,—then the waxen effigies large as life, and disposed in various attitudes, some as if reclining on sofas, others standing upright each with an arm ominously extended, and all displaying upon their fleshlike surfaces the appearance of some loathsome ravaging, and corroding disease,—such an assemblage of horrible and ghastly objects was indeed but too well calculated to scare those persons who could not look upon them with a coldly scientific eye.

In addition to his museum, Dr. Ferney had a laboratory,—not however for alchemical purposes, he being no believer in the philosopher's stone or the elixir of life, but for purely chemical experiments and the legitimate objects of a true science. The doctor devoted a great deal of his time to the pursuits of his laboratory; and many curious discoveries did he make, and many valuable eliminations accomplish. Few of these, however, did he give forth to the world: he was a man who cared nothing for fame—devotion to his studies had rendered him somewhat misanthropic—and in pursuing these studies with such in-

satiate ardour, it was not to form for himself a grand reputation, nor to confer blessings upon his fellow-creatures by adding to the lights of science, but simply, and we might almost say selfishly, to gratify his own individual thirst for knowledge. In this respect he resembled the bookworm who pores over mystic volumes, ferrets out mouldering manuscripts, deciphers hieroglyphics, and devotes years and years to the rectification of some particular date or the clearing up of some dubious point in history, but who after all keeps his discoveries to himself, devours his learning in secret, revels in solitude upon the literary treasures which he thus amasses, and allows not the world at large to benefit by the results of his perseverance or to share in the fruits of his labours. Of precisely such a character was Dr. Ferney; and yet he had been enabled so completely to conceal his light under a bushel that none of its rays peeped forth. Some few of his discoveries had transpired in various ways: yet when he had seen them recorded in print, accompanied with high eulogiums upon himself, he experienced no emotion of pleasure—no inward triumph—no feeling of satisfaction.

Nevertheless, such a man could not help becoming famous to a certain extent—though he himself sought not after fame. As a physician he grew eminent; and he was diligent in the exercise of his professional duties, not for the sake of reputation, but because he thereby acquired ample revenues. But wherefore did this man, so frugal in his habits, so humble in his domestic economy, so completely dissevered from every pursuit which the world calls *pleasure*, and with no family cares or claims to make him wish for riches,—wherefore, it will be asked, did such a man covet much gold? Because he expended large sums in the prosecution of his favourite avocations. He thought no more of giving a thousand guineas for a mummy, than a wealthy aristocrat would in purchasing a race-horse; and if he read in any foreign journal of some extraordinary object in natural history existing at such-and-such a place, he would instantaneously despatch a trusty agent to procure the same, no matter at what price. Thus, for instance, he had in his museum the skeleton of a Russian giant seven feet seven inches high, who had died a few years back in Siberia and whose remains the doctor

had purchased of the man's relatives (through his trusty agent) for a considerable sum. He had also the body of a German dwarf, only two feet six inches high, and who had lived to a very advanced age: this corpse, which was preserved in spirits of wine. Dr. Ferney had also purchased of the deceased pygmy's friends at the time of his death. But it would be impossible to enumerate the various curiosities of this ghastly nature which Dr. Ferney had succeeded in procuring. Enough has however been said to enable the reader to form an idea of the perseverance with which he pursued the bent of his taste, and the large outlays which were needed to gratify it.

He was a man of about forty-five years of age; and from his earliest youth had given indications of this singularity of genius and disposition with which the lapse of years was destined to show such remarkable developments. Of middle stature—thin, pale, and with a countenance that in every line and lineament denoted deep thought and continuous study—Dr. Ferney was not one of those men who are calculated to win the female heart. Without being at all repulsive, he still was very far from prepossessing. He was unmarried; and of all beings in the world, seemed the most likely to continue so. Yet this man, of such strange tastes, such profound devotion to the mysteries of science, and of such misanthropic habits, had not only loved, but still cherished in the depths of his soul the image of her who many years back had made so indelible an impression on his mind. His love had not been reciprocated: years and years had elapsed since he had seen its object—and yet the passion remained deep and unextinguishable in his heart. No one knew that he had thus loved, save and except the being on whom that love had been bestowed: no one thought him capable of loving—and to this supposed incapacity was the circumstance of his unwedded condition assigned. Yet on the solitude of his own study—in the secrecy of his laboratory—and even in the mystic silence and loneliness of his museum, would the memory of his love come stealing upon his mind like a perfumed cloud over Arab's sandy dreariness; and the bright and beautiful image which had inspired the sentiment would rise up before his mental vision like a mirage of enchanting delight amidst the trackless sands of the desert. His was

a strange heart to cherish such a feeling: but it existed there nevertheless —a rose blooming on the side of a barren rock!

Such was Dr. Ferney, the eminent physician of Conduit Street.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, and the doctor was seated in his study, poring over a volume on some abstruse subject, when his footman entered to announce that a lady requested an immediate interview. The physician inquired her name—for he was not accustomed to receive visits from females at that hour: but the domestic replied that the lady had said her name was of no consequence, as she was a stranger to Dr. Ferney, but that she entreated the favour of an audience if it were only for a few minutes. The physician accordingly bade the servant introduce the lady to the study; and the lacquey quitted the room for the purpose.

In a couple of minutes the man returned, escorting a lady closely veiled. The footman withdrew, shutting the door behind him; and the doctor placed a chair for the lady's accommodation. She was handsomely dressed, but in a manner which seemed to indicate a motive for disguise. The dark veil was folded thickly over her features, and she retained it with one of her hands in such a way as to keep it in its proper position, so as effectually to conceal her face. She was tall and of a finely developed figure; and though from her manner she appeared somewhat agitated and nervous, yet there was in her gait and gestures a certain dignity mingled with elegance that denoted the well-bred female.

Dr. Ferney knew not how it was, but a strange kind of trouble gradually stole over him—an instinctive feeling that there was some unknown link between himself and this lady who came so mysteriously—a vague and undefined presentiment that despite what she had said to his footman, she was not entirely a stranger to him. So powerfully did these feelings gain upon the physician, that he found himself unable to put such questions as might elicit the lady's objects in visiting him; and the clouds which enveloped his presentiment slowly fading away, it seemed as if his comprehension grew clearer and that a ray of light was dawning in more brightly upon his soul. He trembled—his heart

began to palpitate even with violence—and he experienced the mystic knowledge that behind the dark veil was a countenance which he had seen before and which had remained indelibly impressed upon his memory!

The shallow reasoner and the superficial observer may ridicule this idea of the physician entertaining such a presentient knowledge of who his visitant was, even before she had lifted her veil or given utterance to a word: but the fact is perfectly consistant with the natural course of things. For there *are* such mystic prompting of the mind, such strange and unaccountable foreshadowings, such truthful but inexplicable revealings; and the thoughtful portion of our readers will not dissent from the assertion. Has it not happened—aye, and often too—that when a young man and a young woman have been introduced to each other for the first time, there has arisen immediately and at once in their soul the instinctive feeling that they were destined for each other?—and this recognition of the *ideal* that each had formed relative to a future partner for life, has been thus mutual and simultaneous. "*'Tis she!*" murmurs the secret voice in the soul of the man: "*'Tis he!*" simultaneously whispers a like mysterious voice in the soul of the female. And thenceforth their destiny is accomplished, even as it had been foreshadowed ere they had ever met. Again, when one man has been introduced for the first time to another, there has arisen in the secret depths of the heart a sudden feeling of liking or aversion between the two, and the conviction that they have been predestined to exercise a powerful influence for good or for evil upon each other. We might multiply such illustrations to an endless amount: they are facts beyond dispute—and whatever may be the nature of the mysterious essence which thus subsists between mind and mind, and whatever be the origin of those strange presentiments, their power cannot be denied. Analogous therewith was the presentient knowledge which on the present occasion made Dr. Ferney aware who his visitant must be, even before he had acquired any positive certitude upon the subject.

Doubtless the lady herself observed the trouble and agitation which thus

came over the physician: for she at length broke silence by saying, "Is it possible that you already suspect who I am?"

"Ah, that voice!" ejaculated Dr. Ferney: and for nearly a minute he seemed overpowered by the emotions which those flute-like sounds excited still more strongly and vividly within him.

Slowly did the lady speak again; and now she said, "Yes, Dr. Ferney—I am that same Mrs. Smith who lodged with your mother nineteen years ago, and who—But I need say no more to recall myself to your memory."

"No, no—for I had not forgotten you; it was impossible I could have forgotten you!" exclaimed the physician, with a singular vehemence. "Nineteen years have passed, you say? Yes—I know it—I have calculated those years with perhaps a greater exactitude than yourself. But pardon me," he observed, suddenly interrupting himself; "you must think that I am talking strangely?"

The lady did indeed think so: at all events she was astonished to hear him speak in those fervid accents, and give utterance to such words, the reason and meaning of which however she could not fail to understand. For at the far back date which had been mentioned—namely, nineteen years ago—she had been aware that Ferney loved her: she knew at the time that she was the object of his enthusiastic adoration: but she could not possibly suppose that this love of his had survived the lapse of time, and that at the expiration of so long a period she should hear him speak and behold him look in a manner which indicated that the flame of his passion had not been extinguished within him.

"You do not answer me," he said after a brief pause. "Is it possible that I have offended you?"

"No, no: how could you give me offence?" exclaimed the lady, now proffering him her right hand, but still retaining the veil carefully folded over her countenance with the left.

"Madam," said Dr. Ferney, as he took that proffered hand and pressed it in his own, which trembled violently, "I am rejoiced that I have not offended you. It is not my fault if I have thought of you often and often—yes, very often—during the long interval that has elapsed since last we met. Then I was young—and not wrinkled, nor emaciated, nor care-worn in looks, with hard study and

unwearied pursuance of the lights of science, as I am now! So that you must find me much altered? Though not many years past the prime of life, yet am I prematurely old—But you," he suddenly exclaimed, "cannot be so much altered as I am? And yet you conceal your countenance! Wherefore do you remain thus closely veiled? But no matter. I see before me that countenance as I beheld it in the glory of its beauty nineteen years ago; and if on raising that veil you were to reveal a face as much marred by the ravages of time as mine is, yet should I not behold it as it may now appear, but as I first saw it and as my memory has treasured it up."

"Is it possible," murmured the lady, evidently agitated and bewildered, "that you have thus continued to think of me during this long interval of time?"

Dr. Ferney did not immediately answer the question; but after a long pause, which seemed to be filled with deep and mournful reflections, he said in a low voice, "I never loved any one save you!"

And have you never once seen me—nor even fancied that you have seen me, since we parted at your mother's residence nineteen years ago?" asked the lady: and through the deep folds of the veil her eyes seemed to shine brightly as they were fixed with keenest scrutiny upon the countenance of the physician.

"No—not once," answered Dr. Ferney. "Do you reside in London? or have you occasionally visited the metropolis? But pardon me—I was wrong to ask those questions. From the past I am well aware that circumstances of mystery attend upon you—though heaven knows that sooner than breathe a word from my lips calculated to do you an injury, I would lay down my life to render you a service!"

"Generous-hearted man!" exclaimed the lady, once more proffering him her hand. "Little did I expect such a reception! Methought that my image must have long years ago passed out of your memory, and that though perhaps you might now and then think of one circumstance which you cannot very well have forgotten, yet that it was regarded as a mere straw floating upon the great ocean of the past, and without importance or power sufficient to add one single

ripple to your pathway over the waters of life."

"Not so—not so," responded Dr. Ferney, as he pressed the lady's hand between both his own. "The feeling that I experienced for you when you dwelt so many years back beneath my mother's roof—that mother who is long since dead—has never faded away from my heart. I may tell you this now, because I am an old man and my words can have little influence upon you or your destinies."

"Dr. Ferney," was the lady's response, "after all the generous words you have spoken to me, and after declaring that you would rather lay down your life to do me a service than breathe a word to do me an injury, it would be wrong—it would be unrateful—were I to treat you with such mistrust as to retain my veil over my features. Besides—you say that my countenance is impressed upon your memory—"

"Yes—indelibly!" exclaimed the physician. "But it would be that happiness which I had never dared anticipate to behold it once again."

The lady slowly raised her veil; and an expression of mingled delight, admiration, and surprise came upon the countenance of Dr. Ferney. So little had time changed the beauty of those splendid features that it appeared to him as if the lapse of nineteen years had not taken place—that it had been all a dream—and that he saw her now as he had been wont to see her when at his mother's residence. For that lapse of time, while maturing the beauty of this magnificent woman, had only seemed to add to the glory and the splendour of her loveliness. There was perhaps less of youthful softness in her looks—but the light of her eyes had not waned—the raven darkness of her hair had not paled nor lost its gloss—the richness of the red had not withered on the lips—nor the evenness of the flesh become indented with a single wrinkle.

"'Tis the same—the very same!" murmured the physician, in accents that were only just audible: then passing his

d over his eyes, he said, "Is it a delicious dream? or is it a

reality? I cannot doubt

more did he appear so

is emotions that he

was almost about to faint.

"And during this long interval," said the lady, repeating her former question with an evident anxiety to

receive the confirmation of the former response, "you have never once seen me?"

"No—never once," returned the physician. "By the nature of the query I must of course suppose that you either dwell in London or visit it frequently: but even if you are constantly riding or walking abroad it would not be surprising that we have never met: for I go out so little—never into society—only to visit the patients who cannot come to me: and in those professional rounds I am whirled rapidly along in my carriage, for my time is so precious! Then, even when thus flying about in my carriage, my attention is ever fixed on some book which I take with me; so that seldom is it I gaze forth from the window of the vehicle—and thus, if every day you pass me by, I should not see you. But let me again beseech and implore that you will experience no mistrust in me. Good heavens! I am incapable of injuring you; and even if I were capable, I know not that I have the power. For with reference to that incident to which I need not allude more pointedly, I scarcely understood its meaning and purpose at the time, and assuredly I feel no inclination to fathom it now. Whatever mysteries be yours, keep them—cling to them—and rest confident that so far as I am concerned they are safe. You have conferred upon me too much happiness by thus permitting me to gaze upon that countenance again, not to inspire me with the liveliest gratitude in addition to any other sentiment I may have experienced towards you."

"And are you not surprised to receive a visit from me?" asked the lady.

"Yes—and yet not altogether surprised; for without being able to explain it even unto myself," continued the doctor, "I must inform you that there has often arisen in the depths of my soul a presentiment that we should one day meet again. But observe, this presentiment has not been accompanied by *hope*. I never was wildly enthusiastic nor drivellingly foolish enough to anticipate that the feeling which my heart has cherished would ever be crowned with happiness. Yet I felt, as I have said, that he should meet again; and I now rejoice that we have thus met. Such is the tone and temper of my mind

that when you depart hence, no dreariness nor dismalness will be left behind you; but on the contrary, the light of your transient presence will appear to linger within these walls and cheer me on my way. You see that I can speak rationally and calmly upon this subject, as becomes my years, and as becomes perhaps the position of her whom I am now addressing. For that you were not what you seemed when dwelling at my mother's residence, I felt assured; and that your's is no plebeian nor middle grade, I am equally confident now. But who you might have been I never sought to know; and who you are I purpose not to inquire at present. Those are your secrets—and they are sacred in my estimation. Besides, I have no undue curiosity; mine is a disposition of another stamp. But pardon this long speech. All I have said is merely to inspire you with the necessary confidence to induce you to explain the purpose of your visit: for that you have an object in coming to me this evening, I must of course conclude."

"Dr. Ferney, you are a man of too much sense," replied the lady, "for me to dream of flattering or complimenting you so emptily—so transparently—as by a declaration to the effect that I came hither for the mere purpose of reviving the friendship of former days. No it was purely business-matter that brought me hither; and as I era now said, little did I anticipate so kind, so generous a reception. I fancied that we should meet almost as strangers: but it has proved otherwise—and I have therefore the less difficulty in explaining my purpose. Do you recollect that when you had your little house in Islington—at a time when you could scarcely foresee the eminence to which you were destined to rise, and which has enabled you to move to his fashionable quarter of the town,—do you remember, I ask, that you had a little laboratory opening from your private sitting-room up-stairs?"

"When I removed from that house," replied Dr. Ferney, "it cost me many a pang to do so, because you had visited me there. Ah! can I forget that laboratory? do I not remember that one entire morning was passed with you there? and you seemed to take so deep an interest in the various experiments I showed you—Oh! it was that which emboldened me at the time to throw myself at your feet and declare how much I loved you!"

"And you remember also," continued the lady, "that there were two or three of your experiments in which I was so much interested that I besought you to give me written descriptions of the several processes—and you did so."

"And those receipts—have you preserved them? have you ever thought any more of them?" asked Dr. Ferney, with a glow of pleasure upon his countenance.

"I have preserved them—I have amused myself on several occasions with the experiments themselves—and I can assure you," added the lady, with a sweet smile, "that I have fulfilled the instructions with a success that you yourself, as my preceptor in the science, would have viewed with satisfaction. Do you remember that one of those receipts was for a peculiar compound fluid which yourself had just succeeded in discovering?"

"Yes—and the discovery of which Liebig has just claimed as his own," added Dr. Ferney. "But no matter—the credit was mine, if any there were. You mean chloroform?"

"The same," answered the lady. "Well, I now come to the object of my present visit. A bottle of this subtle fluid has been stolen from me: it has fallen into the hands of persons whose desperate characters I have too much reason to know; and I dread lest the most fearful uses should be made of it. Therefore have I lost no time in coming to make you acquainted with this circumstance. For to tell you the truth, I feared that if such evil uses as I anticipate should be made of the fluid, and that you heard of any such case, you might at once, on the impulse of the moment, declare *that some years back you had communicated the secret to a lady; and that from her only could the dangerous elimination have been procured.* Under such circumstances I might become seriously compromised—for carelessness, at the least—for from what you told me at the time I thought it very improbable you would ever communicate the secret to another—"

"Ah! I recollect," exclaimed Dr. Ferney, "I said that inasmuch as you had taken so deep an interest in that discovery, it should remain sacred on your account; so that I might have the satisfaction of thinking to myself that there was at least one being in the

world whose smile of approval had gladdened me in my scientific pursuits."

"It was because you spoke thus," rejoined the lady, "and because I read at the time the generosity and sincerity of your character, that I felt assured they were not idle words you had uttered. Therefore, when the phial of fluid was purloined from me last night, I said to myself, 'If it should really be the case that to me only in the world has Dr. Ferney entrusted his secret, I now stand a twofold risk. In the first place, should an evil use be made of the fluid by the hands into which it has fallen, and if he comes to hear of it, he may proclaim to the world that from a certain lady could the subtle essence alone have been obtained. Or else, in the second place, he will perhaps ascribe direct to me whatsoever crime may be perpetrated; and it would be terrible to suffer thus in the estimation of any one'—These were the terms in which I reasoned to myself; and therefore, in anticipation of whatsoever may ensue from the loss of my phial of chloroform, I resolved upon paying you this visit."

"I am glad—I am rejoiced," replied the doctor, "that the incident has occurred, since it has procured me the happiness of your presence. But what would you have me do? in what way can I assist you? Speak—you can command me in all things."

"Should you hear of any case in which the villains who have stolen the fluid make an evil use of it, you will pass the matter over in silence—you will take no step that shall lead to farther investigations? Will you promise me this, doctor?" asked the lady.

"I will—most faithfully and most readily," replied the physician. "Is this all that you require? is this all that I can do?"

"I have nothing more to ask," rejoined the lady. "And now, Dr. Ferney," she said, rising from her seat, "I must take my leave. But one word!" she exclaimed, as a sudden thought struck her. "If perchance," she continued in that winning way which women know so well how to adopt towards those over whose hearts their charms have power, "should we ever meet in the great world, it must be as simple acquaintances—almost as strangers, and not a word from your lips will suffer others to know under what circumstances we met long years ago—much less for what purpose!"

"Have I not already told you," asked the doctor, in a mildly and mournfully reproachful voice, "that I would sooner die than do you an injury. Relative to that purpose of which you speak, I have so far buried it in oblivion that it remains entombed at the bottom of my soul. Did the inquisition exist now, and rear its hydra-head armed with all its terrors in the very heart of England, not even all the torture of the rack should drag forth that secret from me. It is yours—not mine."

"Generous man that you are! accept my warmest, sincerest, most heartfelt thanks! And think not that though nineteen years have elapsed since last we met, I have been unmindful of your welfare. I have watched you from a distance—I have seen you rise to eminence—and I have been rejoiced. If I did not send you my congratulations, it was because But no matter! I congratulate you now—and with a fervid sincerity."

"But you will not leave me thus abruptly?" said the physician. "You, who were interested in my little laboratory at Islington, will surely condescend to cast a look within the walls of the larger one which I possess in Conduit Street? And you remember too, that nucleus of a museum which I had formed, also in Islington—a small closet containing a few curiosities, with difficulty purchased by the hard savings of these times? Well, the little nucleus in the small closet has grown and expanded into a large collection, filling a suite of four chambers within these walls."

"Yes—I will with pleasure visit your laboratory and your museum," returned the lady, who was evidently anxious to render herself agreeable to the physician, as an additional inducement for him to keep inviolable the several secrets with which he appeared to be entrusted.

"Come then," said Ferney: and taking a lamp off his reading-desk, he left the way from the study.

Crossing a landing place, the physician guided the lady along a passage to a door which he threw open; and she soon found herself in the laboratory. We need not pause to describe in detail the appearance of this place; the imagination of our readers can easily depict the shelves covered with jars and bottles duly labelled with

chemical hieroglyphics—the furnace in one corner—the alembics, retorts, and other implements which lay scattered about—the book-case containing several curious volumes—and the table in the middle, crowded with phials filled with fluids of all colours and qualities, saucers containing crystals, and the other results of a wondrous science perseveringly pursued by one of its most ardent disciples.

The lady, after examining the various implements with great apparent interest and curiosity, turned towards the table, and inspecting the phials, asked several questions relative to their contents. Dr. Ferney, who for years had never been excited by any tribute of praise or any personal homage shown to his scientific genius, was now perfectly overjoyed at the interest which the lady seemed to take therein. But then he loved her—he had worshipped her image for those long, long years—and she was now present with him in the living reality! He explained to her one after another the natures and uses of the various fluids contained in the phials; and at length taking up one which she herself had not noticed, he said, "Here is a liquid of so deadly a poison, that I am even surprised at my own indiscretion in leaving it here. It is fortunate however that my servants possess no undue curiosity, and never penetrate to my private rooms without previous orders. Indeed, the foolish creatures declare that they are haunted," added the doctor with a smile.

"But this remarkable poison of which you began to speak," said the lady: "is it also a new discovery of yours?"

"It is an elimination which I succeeded in obtaining but yesterday," replied Dr. Ferney. "There is no poison so fatal in existence. It needs not even so much as a drop poured down the throat; the point of a feather dipped therein and placed with the gentlest touch upon the lip, would produce instantaneous death. The peculiar property of the fluid is that it is inodorous as it is likewise clear as water."

"And wherefore this deadly—this terrible discovery?" asked the lady "what purpose can it serve?"

"Not that to which I may have seemed to allude," replied the physician, again smiling: for he experienced a rare happiness in the company of the object of his undying affection. "But by means of this fluid, used

infinitesimally with large admixtures, I have no doubt of accomplishing some wondrous cures. Let us now pass on into the museum:"—and thus speaking, Dr. Ferney placed the little phial containing the deadly poison on the edge of the table.

How now took up the lamp once more, and was leading the way out of the laboratory, when there was a sudden crash and a sort of stifled shriek on the part of the lady. Dr. Ferney turned hastily round; and on perceiving what it was, he besought her not to vex herself on account of the accident.

"Oh, how awkward—how careless on my part!" she cried, with an air of the utmost annoyance. "It was the fringe of my shawl that swept all these phials from the table."

"No matter! no matter!" said the physician. "Pray do not blame yourself."

"But the fruits of your labours?" she exclaimed, looking down at the quantity of broken glass and the pool of liquid on the floor.

"Again I say no matter!" persisted the physician, who was annoyed only on the lady's account—for he appeared deeply vexed.

"But the phial containing the deadly poison?" she observed. "That, I fear was amongst them."

"Still no matter!" rejoined Dr. Ferney. "It perhaps serves me right for leaving it about in so negligent a manner. Come and let me show you the wonders of my museum."

The lady accordingly followed him from the laboratory; and as she did so, she took the opportunity of thrusting into her bosom something which she had held in her hand.

They now ascended a flight of stairs and on reaching the landing above, Dr. Ferney opened a door which led into the suite of apartments containing the various objects of physiological curiosity, anatomical preparation, and waxen effigy, to which he alluded at the opening of this chapter.

"Here," said the doctor, as he held the lamp before an array of skulls upon a shelf, "are the heads of many celebrated criminals, procured—no matter exactly how. To the lover of the phrenological science each head tells its own peculiar story, and without previous knowledge, affords a certain clue to the reading of the history of the individual to whom it belonged. The very crimes which the wretched

perpetrated and for which they suffered, are distinctly evidenced by the construction of their skulls. Now, here," continued the doctor, carrying the lamp to the front of a mummy in its case, "is an Egyptian Princess dug out of the Pyramid of Cheops. This one next to it is the petrified form of a male slave found in a kitchen belonging to a palace in Herculaneum. It was dug out from amidst the lava, which had preserved instead of destroying it. See that iron chain upon the leg: it was the badge of servitude! Here, in this next case, is a corpse which, to tell you the truth, I procured from the resurrection-men several years ago. Ah! I used to be a good customer to them, when bodies could not be so easily obtained as they can now. This furnishes the result of an experiment of mine in embalming. See how admirably it is preserved! does it not seem as if the individual had only died yesterday? But while I think of embalming, I can show you another specimen. That also I procured from the body-snatchers; and, by the bye, it is just about nineteen years ago—shortly after our acquaintance in London ended and you quitted my mother's abode. Business called me into the country; and there I purchased this *subject* which I am about to show you. It seems he was drowned. He must have been a very fine young man: and I flatter myself that it is the most successful experiment I ever made in the process of embalming. Here, this way."

Thus speaking, Dr. Ferney led the lady into the adjacent room: and there, advancing close up to a tall coffin-looking case, which stood upright on one end, and with a glass front he pointed to its inmate, saying, "This is the one."

The lady, though naturally of strong mind, had contemplated with some degree of cold horror the various objects hitherto pointed out: but, as already stated, it suited her purpose to manifest as much interest as she was able in the things that constituted the doctor's favourite studies. She now advanced up to this fresh object of curiosity to which Dr. Ferney had alluded: but what words can depict her horror, astonishment, and dismay, when she thus found herself as it were face to face with Ralph Farefield?

For the doctor's visitress, as the reader has doubtless all along known, was

none other than Lady Saxondale!

Yes—there stood Ralph Farefield, looking as if he had not been dead a day—apparelled, too, in a befitting suit of raiment; for thus was the doctor accustomed to clothe his *subjects*, so as to give them a life-like appearance. Yes—there was Ralph Farefield, gazing with his artificial eyes of glass, forth from his coffin-case, upon the horror-stricken Lady Saxondale. Fortunate for her was it that utter consternation paralyzed her voice and for the moment struck her dumb,—fortunate, too, was it that a massive table was near, against which she supported herself as she staggered back, fortunate also was it that Dr. Ferney had his own eyes turned towards the corpse at the time; for had it not been for all these circumstances, Lady Saxondale would have screamed out—would have sunk down upon the floor—and would have betrayed the terrible emotions so suddenly excited by this tremendous discovery. And never, too, had her natural strength of mind been so abruptly called upon to put forth all its powers: never was the readiness of self-possession so completely needed! Nor was she at fault in these respects. She became herself all in a moment: but it was with a terrible effort that cost agonies in making it—and the coolness she assumed was unnatural to a degree.

"It is indeed wonderful, my dear Dr. Ferney," she observed. "Your success in the art of preserving these objects is beyond all parallel. Truly, you must have discovered the Egyptian secret: the lost key has been found by you. But, ah!" she suddenly exclaimed, as a clock in the museum struck eleven—a circumstance of which she was only too glad to avail herself as an excuse for immediate departure—"is it possible that I have been here two long hours? And now it is so late! The time has slipped away—how fast, how fast! My dear Dr. Ferney, I must say farewell at once."

"And may I hope," inquired the physician, "that on some future occasion you will favour me with your presence in my humble abode? But no—not for the world unless perfectly agreeable to yourself—"

"Yes, doctor—I will assuredly visit you again. Meanwhile you will re-collect the promise you have made me?"

"It were impossible to forget anything in connexion with you—and equally impossible not to keep any pledge you have required."

Lady Saxondale was now escorted by Dr. Ferney out of the museum; and she appeared to breathe more freely when the door of that hideous place had closed behind her. Carefully covering her countenance with her veil again, she descended the stairs, preceded by the physician, who carried the light; and in the hall she bade him farewell. For a moment he felt the pressure of her hand as it held his own; and when she had departed, and the street-door was shut again, and the doctor was left to the solitude of his own thoughts, that pressure of the hand seemed to linger—it was still felt—and the music of the voice still sounded in his ears.

Strange was the love which this man felt for that woman, whose real name he knew not and of whose station in life he was equally ignorant! But this love of his—was it an infatuation? No; it was rather a deep and holy devotion which his heart offered up eternally at the shrine of love. How strange, then, is the influence of love! but in how many varied ways does it manifest its power! Even the strong mind of that man—a man given up to philosophic study and scientific research—yielded to its influence: its etherealizing spirit commingled with the tide of his erudition—it interwove itself amidst the tissues of his learning—and ampler and ampler though the stores of knowledge grew in that man's soul, there was yet no infringement upon the space forming the tabernacle which enshrined his love.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LISTENERS.

ON the following day, at about two o'clock in the afternoon, William Deveril knocked at the front door of Saxondale House.

"Is her ladyship at home?" he inquired of the hall-porter; and while his face was very pale and even careworn, there was nevertheless a certain decisiveness in his looks and accents which indicated a firm and settled purpose.

"Her ladyship is at home, sir," was the porter's reply, given coldly though

not insolently; "but I am sorry to say I have orders not to admit you."

"Under most circumstances such an intimation," replied Deveril, "would be respected by any one of good manners and breeding: but there are also circumstances which justify an individual in demanding an audience and insisting upon his demand being complied with. Such are the circumstances in which I am placed."

"I am afraid I cannot help you, sir," said the hall-porter, standing at the door in such a way as to be ready to bar Deveril's entrance, should he make the attempt.

"Do not pay me such an ill compliment," he observed, in a gentle though manly tone of rebuke, "as to suppose that I shall endeavour to force my way into the house. I am incapable of such conduct. But what I desire is, that you send up a message to Lady Saxondale to the effect that I demand an interview, not as a favour, but as a right."

"I will certainly send up a message," said the hall-porter: and no longer thinking it necessary to keep the doorway guarded, he turned round and directed a footman to report to her ladyship what Mr. Deveril had said.

In a few minutes the footman, who, different from the hall-porter, was an insolent, self-sufficient conceited puppy of a fellow, came rushing down the stairs; and shouting out, "Her ladyship says you are to be off"—banged the door violently in Deveril's face.

Now, it happened that Juliana Farefield was in the dining-room opening from the hall at the time this scene took place; and as the door was only ajar she overheard everything that passed. As the reader is aware, she was previously incredulous relative to her mother's tale; and the step which Deveril had thus taken fully confirmed this incredulity on her part. The calm decisive manner in which Deveril had spoken, appeared to be stamped with a consciousness of his own innocence and of the foul wrong which he had received; and as Juliana was very far from wanting in shrewdness and good sense, the young gentleman's conduct could not fail to make a strong impression on her mind. Thinking that he would either return, or else take some other step in order to procure an explanation at Lady Saxondale's hands—and being curious to watch the result—Juliana determined to be on the look-out for the remainder of the

afternoon. Being presently joined by her sister, she communicated to her what had happened; and Constance, who likewise possessed a large share of curiosity, now became equally anxious to see how the affair would progress.

An hour after Deveril's rude dismissal from the house, a very loud knock and a very imperious ring were given at the front door; and the moment the hall-porter opened it, a short stout gentleman, well, but quaintly dressed, marched without ceremony into the hall. Having thus gained a footing inside the fortress, he seemed to consider it as good as taken: for he said in a tone of authority to the impudent puppy of a footman who at once accosted him, "Show me up-stairs to her ladyship."

This mode of address, coupled with the gentleman's air of confidence, at once produced the desired effect: for as he gave no card, and walked in with so little ceremony, it was natural to suppose that he knew perfectly well what he was doing and was certain of being well received. The footman accordingly conducted him up the spacious staircase; and on reaching the landing he said in the usual manner, "What name, sir, shall I announce?"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," was the reply.

"Mr. Gunthorpe!" vociferated the footman, as he threw open the door leading into the drawing-room where Lady Saxondale was seated.

Here we must interrupt the narrative for a moment to state that Juliana and Constance, being on the watch in the dining-room, had witnessed the arrival of the stout gentleman—had heard the imperious manner in which he addressed the footman—and had peeped forth to survey him with more attention than they had been enabled to bestow at the glimpse they caught of him from the window when ascending the front-door steps.

"I do declare," whispered Juliana, "that he exactly answered the description given of that Mr. Gunthorpe whom Edmund described to us so ludicrously! The same scratch wig—the same overhanging chin—the same curiously-fashioned garments—"

"Yes: but what can he want with mamma?" asked Constance.

"Let us see," responded Juliana. "I have a presentiment that his visit is in some way or another connected with Mr. Deveril."

The two young ladies quitted the dining-room—ascended the staircase

—and stealing into an apartment adjoining that where Mr. Gunthorpe had just been introduced to Lady Saxondale's presence, they placed themselves at the door of communication between the two rooms. The door was shut: but it was easy to overhear in one apartment what was taking place in the other; and so the two Miss Farefields were enabled to gratify their curiosity to the utmost extent.

Let us now look on the other side of the door at which Juliana and Constance are listening.

Lady Saxondale, on hearing the name of Mr. Gunthorpe announced, recognized it at once as that of an individual whom she had overheard her son Edmund hold up to ridicule one day when he was in a lively and bantering mood; and certainly the appearance of this gentleman was sufficient to confirm in her ladyship's mind whatever amount of ludicrous impression her son's discourse concerning him had previously made. Not for an instant did it strike Lady Saxondale that he came about William Deveril's business; and feeling offended at the uncircumstantial way in which he had caused himself to be announced, she received him with the most freezing coldness. Mr. Gunthorpe was however the last person on the face of the earth to be discomfited by such a reception; and coolly taking a seat, though altogether unasked, he observed, "I dare say your ladyship is much surprised at this visit on the part of one who has obtained no formal introduction?"

"I presume, sir," returned Lady Saxondale, with an ice-like dignity, "that having some trifling knowledge of my son you have called to see him? But he is not at home at the present time—"

"I beg your ladyship to understand," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "that I should not take so unwarrantable a liberty as to presume upon my slight—very slight acquaintance with Lord Saxondale so far as to intrude myself upon the privacy of his mother. But my object is to have some serious conversation with your ladyship on behalf of a young gentleman in whom I am somewhat interested—I mean Mr. Deveril."

So unexpectedly was this announcement made, and therefore so totally unprepared was Lady Saxondale to preserve her presence of mind when that name appeared to be thrown at her like an accusation, that she gave a

sudden start and looked confused. But the loss of fortitude could only be momentary with a woman of her strong mind; and therefore immediately recovering herself, she said, coldly and distantly as before, "Out of respect for your years, sir, I will listen to what you may have to say: but I cannot promise you to pardon the young man on whose behalf you are come."

"Pardon, my lady!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe with some little show of indignation. "It is not pardon that he seeks—it is justice. Pardon is to be sought by those who injure—not by those who are injured."

"The only interpretation I can put upon your words, sir," rejoined Lady Saxondale, with a voice and look of consummate assurance, "is to suppose that Mr. Doveril has given you some false version of his conduct towards me—"

"Or of your ladyship's conduct towards him? But no!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe: "he is incapable of speaking falsely."

"And I, sir," cried Lady Saxondale, her cheeks suffusing with a crimson glow and her eyes flashing fire,—"do you dare insinuate that I am capable of speaking falsely?"

"Madam," returned Mr. Gunthorpe, "it is always an unpleasant business to make accusations at all; but the task becomes doubly disagreeable when the accuser is one of the stronger sex, and the accused is one of the weaker. Such is the present case."

"Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lady Saxondale, rising from her seat upon the sofa, "this interview cannot proceed farther."

"Madam," answered the old gentleman, "I am not a man to be diverted from my course by any overbearing conduct. I am not one of those who are dazzled by the false lustre of patrician rank. I know very well that meteors blaze at a distance, but when they fall down upon the earth they prove to be merely vile stones. So it is with the false gods and goddesses of the British aristocracy; and therefore I neither worship such idols nor can be intimidated by them."

"Mr. Gunthorpe, if you have come hither on purpose to insult me," said Lady Saxondale, resuming her seat upon the sofa, "I must submit: for it would grieve me much to be compelled to order my lacqueys to eject a gentle-

man of your respectable appearance and advanced years."

"I am confident that you do not even entertain the thought of such a thing. Lady Saxondale, as daring to bid a lacquey lay a hand upon me:"—and as Mr. Gunthorpe thus spoke, he looked her ladyship firmly and resolutely in the face, till, conscience-stricken, her own gaze covered beneath his own. "Now, will you permit me without interruption to tell you a little anecdote, the object and purpose of which I will explain to you at the end. It is this:—A lady of proud title, a widow, who has always borne in the presence of the world an untainted reputation, falls in love with a young man, much her inferior in what society has chosen to denominate rank. She is too much a slave to the artificialities and fictions of this same society to think of marrying the young man: but she has so little regard for decency, virtue, and real prudence, as to offer to become this young man's mistress. Yes—this she did in language glowing and warm; and she appeared to think that she had only to make the proposition in order to have it at once accepted. But this lady has grown-up daughters, to whom the best and brightest example should be afforded: and yet in her foolish infatuation, and blinded by her passion, she offers to become the paramour of this young man whose personal beauty has aroused her desires. He rejects the proposal in terms of forbearing gentleness, but with loathing and abhorrence in his heart. Commiserating this lady who has so far forgotten herself in her unfortunate passion, he is even generous enough to promise the concealment of her folly—or shall I say her wickedness? But she menaces him with a terrible vengeance. He leaves her with sorrow in his heart that so much depravity can exist, masked by a beauty of the grandest and most lofty character; and he hopes that her repentance may enable him to throw the veil of secrecy over what has occurred. But conceive what his feelings must be when he discovers that this lady, too faithful to her threatened plan of vengeance, deliberately and purposely calls upon her acquaintances and friends in order to propagate a tale entirely to the prejudices of this young man."

Mr. Gunthorpe ceased speaking—but continued to look very hard at Lady Saxondale, from whose counten-

ance indeed he had not once removed his eyes during the whole time he was delivering that lengthy address. He saw that notwithstanding her natural strength of mind and her proud assurance, she winced at his words—writhed under his narrative as he developed it—experienced an increasing confusion—and showed conscious guilt in every lineament of her countenance.

"Mr. Gunthorpe," she said, with a desperate effort to resume her self-possession, "it would be worse than childish for me to affect ignorance of the illusions you have been making. But, sir,—and she felt her fortitude revive as she went on speaking,—if you dare attribute such conduct to me—if you dare put such a version upon whatsoever passed between Mr. Deveril and myself—I must denounce you as a calumniator and must order you from my presence!"

"Be it as you will, madam," said the old gentleman, rising from his seat and taking up his broad brimmed hat from the chair on which he had deposited it in companionship with his gold-headed cane. "But perhaps you are not aware of the course which it will be necessary to take under existing circumstances? Lady Saxondale, I am a rich man—and for no purpose would I sooner dispense a portion of my wealth than to procure justice for this Mr. William Deveril whom you have so cruelly and wantonly injured. Doubtless you thought, Lady Saxondale, that with your high position—your proud name—your lofty station—and, if need were, even with your gold—you might crush at your will that young man? But it shall not be so. He is not without friends: at all events he has one in me. And I now warn your ladyship that the tribunals shall be appealed to—an action for defamation of character shall be commenced against you—"

"Enough, sir—enough! I have already heard far too much," cried Lady Saxondale, starting up from her seat: for she saw that there was now no alternative but to meet the affair with a brazen effrontery—to take a bold and desperate stand—and to bid defiance to all menaces and to all hostile proceedings.

"One word more, madam," said Mr. Gunthorpe, whose manner seemed to be invested with an authoritativeness irresistibly powerful, and which despite the resolve to which she had just come, exercised its influence over Lady Saxondale. "You possess two daughters

—two grown-up daughters—young women indeed of a marriageable age, and for whom you are doubtless anxious to seek befitting alliances. Consider, madam, the demoralizing example which your conduct is but too well calculated to set them. Think you that if you push the present deplorable incident to the utmost extreme, nothing will transpire detrimental to yourself? Yes—believe me, all the world will put faith in William Deveril's story in preference to your own; and if the verdict of a jury should stamp you as a calumniatrix, it will by the same decision proclaim you to be nothing more than a demirep. Then, madam, what will become of your daughters? will their mother's evil reputation accelerate their chances of forming suitable and proper matrimonial connexions? And your son too, over whom, as I understand, your authority even at present as by no means well established—will he regard the exposure of your gross passion for Deveril and your licentious overtures, as a reason why he should become more obedient? Think of all this, Lady Saxondale, ere you precipitate matters to an irrevocable extreme. At present you may privately repair the injury done to Deveril in those quarters where you have privately inflicted it. I know that it will be gall and wormwood for you to be compelled to recant your allegations, confess that they were calumnies, and give some explanation for your sudden hostility towards him; but ten thousand times worse will it be if in a court of justice all the details of the case are brought to light. Now, madam, for the last time, what is your decision?"

"I have nothing more to say, sir," responded Lady Saxondale, desperately clinging to the resolve she had already formed, and to meet all consequences with a brazen effrontery. "If I have listened to you so long, it is, I repeat, out of respect for your age—"

"No, Lady Saxondale," observed Mr. Gunthorpe, showing by his look that he could read to the depths of her heart as plainly as the eye can penetrate through a crystal streamlet to its pebbly bottom; "you have been influenced by no such generous motive. It is fear, Lady Saxondale—fear that has made you listen to me to the end—yes, fear I repeat, despite the power—

ful efforts which you have exerted and are still exerting to conquer the sentiment! But I will intrude no longer."

At this moment the door opened from the landing, and Lord Saxondale entered the room. He was lounging in with that fashionable affectation of languor and lassitude which seemed as if anything like an exertion were too much for his aristocratic constitution on a sultry day in the middle of summer,—when catching sight of Mr. Gunthorpe, he instantly burst into an ironical laugh, exclaiming in his cracked voice, "Ah! my worthy friend of the *Bell and Crown*, what on earth has brought you from the vulgar regions of the City? You must feel terribly out of place in our fashionable atmosphere."

Nothing could equal the look of mingled scorn and contempt which Mr. Gunthorpe bent upon Edmund Saxondale, as the latter delivered himself of those flippant impertinences. The old gentleman was at that instant neither comical nor common-looking: there was something exceedingly noble and dignified in his appearance, as if he felt in the depths of his own heart that instead of standing before a superior, it was he himself who was gazing down from a higher pedestal than the conceited young coxcomb could ever dream of occupying, no matter what advantages he might possess in respect to birth, rank, riches, and honours. Lady Saxondale herself, who possessed the nicest appreciation of everything that savoured of real dignity, was astonished at the superior look which Mr. Gunthorpe wore at that instant; and even Edmund was overawed by the old gentleman's appearance. His mind was not so completely perverted but he felt he deserved the overwhelming rebuke conveyed in Mr. Gunthorpe's indignant glances; and the rebuke too was more cutting and more searching a thousand times when thus conveyed than if it had been given in words. But still Edmund was not at all the young man to submit with a good grace to the castigation: and promptly recovering his habitual impertinence and self-sufficiency, he gave another affected laugh, exclaiming, "Well done, old fellow! you look just as you did that day when you blew up the cabman in Jermyn street. You remember what I mean?"

"Madam," said Mr. Gunthorpe, turning his eyes towards Lady Saxondale and bending a significant look

upon her, "I really pity you in the possession of such a son as this."

"You insolent old scoundrel!" ejaculated Edmund, becoming all in a moment livid with rage: and clenching his fist, he was about to rush towards the old gentleman, when the latter held up his gold-headed cane with a resoluteness that made the coward youth fall back.

"If you were to dare lay a finger on me, my lord," said Mr. Gunthorpe, calmly, "I would inflict that chastisement which you so richly deserve."

Thus speaking, he walked forth from the apartment, while Lady Saxondale pulled the bell violently. A couple of footmen instantaneously rushed to the room; and Lady Saxondale exclaimed, "Let that person be at once shown out of the house, and never admitted again!"

"Yes—and let him be kicked out!" screamed forth the infuriate Edmund, as he rushed out upon the landing, and looking over the staircase gave this vent to his impotent rage against Mr. Gunthorpe.

But the old gentleman descended the stairs as coolly and imperturbably as if he were merely retiring after having paid an ordinary visit of courtesy,—while the ferule of his cane tapped upon every one of the marble steps as he continued his way.

"What did that old fool want here?" demanded Lord Saxondale, as he sped back into the drawing-room, now intent upon venting his ill humour upon his mother by seeking a quarrel with her.

"Rather let me ask," returned her ladyship, who was in precisely a similar mood towards her son, "how you dare insult a visitor whom you find with me, and thus lead to a scene which is calculated to scandalize the entire household?"

"I insult him indeed!" ejaculated Edmund, now flinging himself lazily upon the sofa, as if exhausted by the effort of even putting himself into a rage. "Why, I think you took it up pretty warmly too, by ringing the bell in that frantic manner and giving such orders to the servants. But I say, mother, what is this story that I hear running like wildfire all over London? Young William Deveril has been making love to you? Now you see what it is to have anything to do with such low fellows as these. I always disliked him, and was a deuced great mind to kick him out of the house."

But Lady Saxondale only threw a glance of sovereign contempt upon her son, as if she knew him to be a coward in his heart notwithstanding the ridiculous boast he had just made; and feeling the necessity of seeking the retirement of her own chamber in order to compose her agitated feelings and ponder well upon the particulars of her interview with Mr. Gunthorpe, she quitted the room.

Meanwhile Juliana and Constance had in the adjoining apartment overheard everything which had taken place. From the very first Juliana had never believed her mother's story respecting Deveril; and the result of Mr. Gunthorpe's visit was to confirm her opinion of its complete and utter falsity. To the same conclusion was Constance necessitated to arrive, though more slowly, with far less readiness to discredit her mother, and with feelings of regret to which Juliana was an entire stranger. Well indeed had Mr. Gunthorpe expatiated on the demoralizing effect of such an example set by a mother to her daughters; yet little did he think that the influence of this example was already felt—little did he imagine that even as he spoke his prophetic words were receiving their fulfilment! and what was the picture presented to the contemplation of these young ladies? That their mother, having cast her affections upon an object whom the conventionalisms of society did not permit her to marry, even if he himself were inclined to espouse her, had offered to take him as a paramour—to throw herself into his arms as his mistress! For that Mr. Gunthorpe had only too faithfully recited what had really passed between their mother and Deveril, Juliana and Constance felt assured; and now therefore they had been brought to regard their own parent as a mere demigod in heart, wearing virtue as a mask and concealing a real depravity beneath that exterior of severe hauteur and imposing dignity.

Whatsoever was impassioned in the temperaments of Juliana and Constance, was now rendered all the more glowing especially in the case of the former, whose hot blood literally boiled in her veins. All the latent heat of her imagination was in a moment fanned into a blaze—a veil appeared to have fallen from her eyes—and she rushed to the conclusion that no women were really virtuous, but that all would seek the opportunity of gratify-

ing their passions, trusting to conceal their frailty and their guilt beneath the mask of hypocrisy. Even the comparatively pure mind of Constance caught the poisonous infection arising from the same source; and in the space of a brief half-hour those two sisters had become years older in the depravities of the imagination.

Oh, wretched wretched Lady Saxondale! if you could only have known how much of the evil seed which is naturally implanted in frail human nature had been all on a sudden made to shoot forth and germinate with fearful rapidity, even almost to the bearing of its kindred fruits, in the bosoms of your daughters, you would have shrunk appalled from the startling fact that it was your doing. For Oh! the Medusa-head of a mother's bad example will paralyse and turn to rigid stone all the lively virtues and healthy qualities of her children. Woe unto thee, Lady Saxondale.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MIRROR.

ABOUT two hours later in the day, Juliana Farefield dressed for dinner in a costume that set off her finely developed charms to the utmost advantage, was half reclining upon a sofa in one of the drawing-rooms, and whiling away the time with a volume of the last new novel. Little however of its contents did the lady's memory retain: for though she was revelling of love there, she was thinking of love at the same time apart from the topic of the book. Her ideas seemed to flow in two distinct channels,—one following the course of the glowing descriptions of love as dressed up by the novelist—the other pursuing the raptures and blandishments of love as she herself felt and understood them.

There was a heightened colour upon her cheeks—a dewy moisture upon her rich red lips—a melting languor in her fine dark eyes—a languor the sensuousness of which was deepened by the half-closing of the lids, as if those eyes, faithfully reflecting the condition of the mind, were weighed down by the delicious thoughts that rested on her soul within. For the soul itself feels a kind of pleasurable oppressiveness and the weight of a softly sensuous

languor when the imagination gives way to the rapt dreamings of love—even as the bee, which sips sweets from every flowers, is oppressed by the burden of the delicious food wherewith it is laden,—or as the breezes of an oriental clime become heavy with the rich perfumes and odours which they have accumulated while they wandered kissing over the brightest and fairest flowers of the earth.

Juliana was alone at the time in that room. Constance was in her own chamber, penning a response to a billet which she had received from the Marquis de Villebelle, through the agency of the faithful Mary-Anne. Lady Saxondale was likewise in her own room, pondering upon her unpleasant interview with Mr. Gunthorpe, and revolving a thousand wild and desperate plans in her mind for the purpose of arresting the hostile proceedings menaced by that gentleman on the part of William Deveril. As for Lord Saxondale, after having returned home for an hour or two just to see if there were any letters for him: he had gone back to the villa in the Seven Sisters' Road, laden with new presents and a fresh supply of costly gifts for the designing and fascinating Emily Archer.

Juliana therefore was alone in the drawing room between five and six o'clock on that day of which we are writing; and what with the inspirations of the novel she was reading, the glowing character of her own thoughts, and the influence of those revelations which had come to her ears in respect to her mother, it was no wonder if she should at length fall into the following train of reflections:—

"Assuredly I should become the laughing stock of the whole world," she said to herself, as she laid aside her book, if I were to run away with Frank Paton and marry him. Yes, for no matter what the secret of his birth may really be, he is but a page after all; and if I wait till that mystery is cleared up with the hope that he may eventually prove to be the son of distinguished persons, I may wait long enough. Besides, how is it possible to wait? I feel that this passion is devouring me—Those, by the bye, are the very words which I have just now read in the novel! How truly some authors do depict our feelings! It was all very well for me to declare to Constance yesterday that I gloried in this love of mine, and that I should

feel proud in becoming the wife of Francis Paton. Yes—but then I did not choose to acknowledge even to myself that there was any shame attached to this love—any reason to blush for it! It was an attempt to blazon forth something that nevertheless sat upon the heart like a remorse. Wherefore should I not imitate my mother's example? She would not marry William Deveril—but she—"

And then Juliana, not yet thoroughly depraved, checked the thought to which she was almost unconsciously giving expression in her musings; and returning to her book, she endeavoured to evade at least that portion of the ideas which had stolen upon her. But it was in vain: the idea was there—the seed had dropped upon a soil by no means unprepared to receive it—and although it might be covered up for a moment, it was nevertheless certain to take root—indeed all the more certain on that very account.

Presently the door opened, and Lady Saxondale entered the apartment. Juliana just lifted her eyes above her book to see who it was, and then went on reading without saying a word. In the same manner her ladyship glanced towards the sofa to see who was half reclining there; and likewise without speaking a word, she turned to the further extremity of the spacious room. There was a mutual feeling of embarrassment and mistrust on the part of the mother and the elder daughter. Lady Saxondale knew that her tale concerning Deveril had not been believed by Juliana: and her guilty conscience therefore made her think that the real truth of the transaction was suspected—for she was very far from entertaining an idea how completely it was known. On the other hand Juliana, being as yet young in the ways of duplicity and deceit, was always fearful lest her mother's eagle glance should detect her passion for the page; and now that somewhat unholy thoughts had arisen in the young lady's mind, her conscience suggested still more troubling fears than before. Thus was it that mistrust and suspicion subsisted between the patrician lady and her daughter.

Lady Saxondale retired, we said, to the farther extremity of the apartment; and seating herself on a sofa, fell into a profound reverie. By a certain arrangement of drapery in the room,

that sofa where Lady Saxondale had seated herself, was concealed from the view of Juliana; and for the same reason the latter, at the place where she lay half-reclined, was hidden from the eyes of her mother.

The young lady went on reading her book—ten minutes or a quarter of an hour elapsed—and as the love passages of the tale grew more interesting, her attention became all the more completely absorbed in the perusal. The consequence was she altogether forgot the presence of her mother in the room—forgot it indeed as completely as if her ladyship were not there at all.

Presently the door opened again, and this time it was Frank Paton who entered. The beautiful youth appeared more beautiful than ever to the eyes of Juliana, inflamed as her imagination was at the moment, and thus keenly prone to enhance every detail of attraction and lineament of beauty. An electric thrill shot quivering through her—the colour heightened upon her cheeks—and fixing upon him as he approached a look brimful of passion, she half murmured, "Adorable boy, how I love you—Oh, how I love you."

He advanced close up to her, handing her a letter which had just arrived.

"Frank, dear Frank," she said in a low soft voice, as his eyes looked tenderly down into hers: and she patted his face with her hand.

He bent down towards her, invited by her gaze and her caresses to do so; and then their lips met in a long delicious kiss. At that instant the recollection flashed to Juliana's mind that Lady Sixondale was in the room; and full of affright was the glance which she threw towards the farther extremity. But the drapery hid her mother from her sight, and she experienced a feeling of indescribable relief at the reflection that she must in the same manner be concealed from her parent's view. Frank had noticed that sudden start—that quick glance of uneasiness—and the sudden disappearance of the carnation hue from cheeks of delicately tinted bistre; instantaneously comprehending what this meant, he likewise grew with affright. But Juliana gave a reassuring tap on the cheek her hand; so that the young page from the room more than ever if possible with the handsome

This young lady then resumed her book; but instead of reading it, gave way to all the rapturous thoughts which the little scene just described had conjured up in her mind.

But every detail of that scene had been witnessed by Lady Saxondale—and in a very simple manner too: namely, the reflecting of the mirrors which embellished the walls of the apartment, and some of which, between the windows, descended to the floor. Yes—every detail of that scene had been witnessed by Juliana's mother! Not that she was watching her daughter at the time through the medium of the tell-tale mirrors: she was not even thinking of her: but it was in a mood of the most perfect abstraction that the eyes of Lady Saxondale were fixed upon the looking glass opposite to her. Conceive her astonishment when she beheld the page bending over Juliana—the latter caressing his cheek with her hand,—yes, even to the looks of passion which her daughter riveted on the handsome youth, did Lady Saxondale behold! But if there were any doubt in her mind—if for a moment she fancied there could be any mistake upon the subject—all uncertainty was cleared up by that long kiss of deliciousness and fervour in which the lips of Juliana and Francis were joined. Lady Saxondale sat perfectly aghast. It was impossible to disbelieve her eyes—and yet she still disbelieved the interpretation which she put upon what she saw. She believed and she disbelieved: all uncertainty was cleared up, and yet she dared not settle her mind upon the conviction thus established. But when the page had retired—when Juliana had resumed her book—when Lady Saxondale was compelled to admit to herself that what she had seen was true, and what had taken place was unmistakable, she felt such an awful feeling come over her that she sat like one petrified—turned into stone, with all the marble's terrible chill at her heart!

Good heavens! what a blow for the pride of the haughty Lady Saxondale! She who plumed herself so highly upon having prolonged the race into which she had married—the time-honoured race of Saxondale: she was regarded that name as one of the proudest chronicled in the page of British history; she who had hoped that ere long some excellent match must present itself for her eldest

daughter; she it was who now became compelled to admit to herself that this daughter had descended to amorous dalliance with a page. And in such a case it was no wonder if her ladyship abandoned herself to a belief in the worst; namely, that Juliana had been more culpable than she really was. At this thought the sense of petrifaction passed quickly away, and was instantaneously succeeded by a feeling as if molten lead had suddenly taken the place of blood in her veins—or as if that blood which a moment before seemed stagnant, had all in an instant been made to boil by the presence of some subtle but all-potent Promethean fire. There was a tingling sensation all over her; and her first impulse was to spring from her seat, rush forward, and tax Juliana with her supposed frailty and shame. But a second thought held her back. She remembered the increasing rebelliousness of her elder daughter's spirit; and she apprehended a scene which might lead to exposure before the household. Besides, if the evil were done it could not be repaired; and all the angry words in the world would not restore a lost virtue. Lady Saxondale therefore curbed her rage, bridled her indignation, and resolved to take no rash nor inconsiderate step. She must separate her daughter from the page: but even this she felt that it were impolitic to do all in a moment, lest Juliana in her wilfulness should leave the house with him, thus abandoning herself altogether to this passion of hers!

Terrible was the state of mind into which the unhappy woman was plunged. Calamities and cares of all kinds seemed gathering around her; and she appeared involved in the tangled web of a destiny that must terminate in ruin. But not long did her ladyship give way to these gloomy reflections: she was too strong-minded to become despondent or despairing on a sudden. She felt that she had need of all her energies in the various matters engaging her attention; and she said to herself, "It is absolutely necessary that I should be equal to the task of meeting all difficulties and accomplishing all ends."

Lady Saxondale's musings were suddenly interrupted by the bursting open of the door nearest to where she sat,—for there were two doors to that spacious apartment;—and the housekeeper Mabel bounced into the room.

By the agility of her movements she certainly appeared to have got well rid of her rheumatism; and if she had been eating the most peppery viands for dinner she could not possibly have been fired up with a greater degree of irritability than she displayed at present. We may even go so far as to state that she was in a boiling rage; and her red face, inflamed as it was with passion, looked like a perfect conflagration in contrast with the white cap with large frills that bordered this rubicund physiognomy.

"Mabel," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, starting from her seat in anticipation of a scene with her irate housekeeper; "what is the meaning of this abrupt intrusion?"

"Intrusion indeed!" screamed forth the woman whom this unfortunate word now appeared to excite almost to a positive frenzy: "everybody is bent on insulting me! But I will put up with it no longer. There is that jackanapes of a fellow who calls himself——"

"Mabel!" cried her ladyship, "take care what you say!"—and it was a strange look that she threw upon her housekeeper. "Tell me, what has my son been doing?"

"Doing? he is always doing something to vex and annoy me," was the response. "I never saw such a sneaking, cowardly fellow in all my life. He has been and told his valet that he will have me banded out neck-and-crop just because I didn't stand aside and curtsey to him as he came down stairs this afternoon. But you know very well that he can't put his threat into execution—don't you, Lady Saxondale?"

"Mother," said Juliana, now rising from the sofa and advancing towards that part of the room where this scene was taking place, "I hope you will not believe everything that Mabel says against Edmund: for I must declare that a more insolent woman than this never had existence. She is constantly showing her airs to me and Constance? and all the servants of the household hate her."

"Oh! they do; do they?" shrieked forth Mabel, the sharp tones of her querulous voice ringing through the room: "then I will make them have something more to hate me for—and as for you, Miss, I snap my fingers at you."

"Mabel, Mabel!" cried Lady Saxondale, who appeared cruelly tortured by this scene; "I must insist——"

"Mother," interposed Juliana, "things have come to this pass in respect to Mabel that either you or she must show who is mistress here. For my part, I am resolved not to put up with her insolence any longer;"—and with these words Juliana walked out of the room, closing the door somewhat violently behind her.

"There! you see how I am treated!" cried the woman the instant she was alone with Lady Saxondale. "Everybody in the house thinks they have a right to insult me."

"Compose yourself, Mabel," said Lady Saxondale, with a look and accents of earnest entreaty. "It is useless for you to give way to these fits of rage——"

"Rage indeed!" she echoed. "Then why do they insult me—eh? Answer me that—answer me that!"

"I must say that you either imagine insults where none are intended, or else draw them down upon your own head. No one, Mabel, would travel out of their way to put a wanton and unmerited insult upon you."

"Ah! I suppose you are going to turn round upon me now. But you shan't though," cried Mabel, with threatening looks and gestures. "Recollect, Lady Saxondale, that with a single breath I could blow to the winds all this fabric of——"

"Hush, Mabel—hush, for God's sake! talk not so wildly—so rashly!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, as she flung a quick glance of apprehension around. "The very walls may have ears——But stay—let us come to some understanding. You are not happy beneath this roof; and over and over again I have offered to provide for you elsewhere. Why will you not retire to some comfortable little retreat, where, with a handsome allowance, you can be your own mistress and do exactly what you like?"

"Why don't I?" ejaculated Mabel: "for many reasons. In the first place, because I don't choose to be kicked off like an old shoe: in the second place because I am fond of authority, and therefore mean to keep my post of her here; and in the third cause I hate certain persons this roof, and therefore opportunity of showing my

last words the woman spoke fiendish malignity which testified the abhorrent nature of her ⁱⁿ; and Lady Saxondale be-

came deadly pale and trembled in every chord and fibre of her whole being as she listened.

"But, Mabel," she said subduing her emotions as well as she could, "this is most unreasonable on your part. Do, for heaven's sake, have some consideration for me! What have I ever done to offend you? Have I not treated you with confidence—done all I could to make you happy——"

"Come, none of this stuff and nonsense, Lady Saxondale!" interrupted Mabel, who looked as if she were determined not to be appeased in any way. "I just tell you once for all that I mean my authority in this house to be second only to your's—that I will have that jackanapes of a fellow and that minx Juliana treat me with becoming respect. So you had better tell them to do so; or else I will have my revenge, no matter what are the consequences."

The woman had grasped the handle of the door as she thus spoke, and was about to fling out of the room, when Lady Saxondale made a motion for her to remain.

"Well—what is it?" demanded Mabel insolently.

"You must not—you really must not give way to these humours——"

"Humours indeed!" and Mabel burst forth into another tirade, pretty well in the same strain as before.

"While she was thus giving voluble vent to her perverse and malignant feelings, Lady Saxondale gradually grew grave and thoughtful. Some idea seemed to be expanding in her mind, and it was evident this new thought was tending towards a desperate resolve. Mabel was still too much a prey to her irritated feelings to notice the ominous expression which Lady Saxondale's countenance had gradually assumed; and after giving vent to some more of her ill-humour, she abruptly withdrew.

"This matter is also coming to a crisis!" muttered Lady Saxondale to herself as the door closed behind the housekeeper. "Mabel is now the most dangerous of all those with whom I have to contend. But——"

And she stopped suddenly short, while the sinister lowering of her brows, the firm compression of her lips, and the decided air with which she turned towards the window,

sufficiently indicated the adoption of some energetic resolve.

Soon afterwards a footman entered to announce that dinner was served up. Lady Saxondale accordingly descended to the dining room, where Juliana and Constance had already met. The three ladies dined alone together that day: there was no company invited—and such a dinner was always held as the dullest thing in the world amongst people in high life. For the families of the aristocracy have seldom any resources of their own—while the frivolities and platitudes of fashionable life become wearisome to a degree, stale and flat beyond measure, when practised amongst themselves. Thus it is that they seldom dine without guests at their table. On the present occasion, therefore, the dinner-scene was tedious and insipid to a degree: but little conversation passed, and that was of a languid description. Nevertheless Lady Saxondale was the whole time watching Juliana's countenance, without appearing to take any unusual notice of her. She looked with the keen eye of a mother, to probe the young lady's secret to the very uttermost, and ascertain if there were any indications to confirm her worst suspicion: but on this head she could gather nothing certain.

The cloth was removed and the dessert was upon the table, when Francis Paton entered the room; and accosting Lady Saxondale, bent down and whispered something in a low voice. Her ladyship gave an involuntary start, and even turned pale for a moment—all of which was observed by Juliana, though she appeared to be deeply occupied at the moment in cutting off the rind from a slice of pine-apple.

"Tell the person I will see her in a few minutes," said Lady Saxondale aloud.

Francis Paton bowed and withdrew; and her ladyship, who evidently remained only for the sake of not appearing to be flurried by the announcement she had received, affected to talk a little more blithely than she had ere now done. But in a few minutes she rose and quitted the room, intimating that she should return almost directly.

"I am convinced," said Juliana to Constance the moment the door closed behind their mother, "that the message she received ~~was~~ from the same old woman who called the night of the great dinner-party. I am certain it is.

What would I give to discover her business! But I do not see how it is possible to go and listen at the parlour-door."

"No—do not risk it, dear Juliana," urged Constance. "To tell you the truth, I almost wish we had not listened to-day when Mr. Gunthorpe called. It is so shocking a thing to have one's confidence shaken in one's own mother!"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Juliana. "We are getting too old for such mawkish sentimentalism; and I for one mean in future to be my own mistress. But this woman—I must go and ascertain if it be she."

With these words Juliana tripped forth from the dining-room which opened into the hall. On the opposite side was the parlour into which persons calling on any private business were usually shown; and it was in that parlour the young lady knew her mother to be now closeted with the woman whose arrival had been announced by Francis. No one was in the hall at the moment; and Juliana, unable to resist the opportunity and the temptation, approached the parlour-door. She heard a female voice speaking at the moment.

"But I insist upon it," said this voice, in a peremptory manner and with loud accents. "I insist upon it, I repeat."

"Hush! do not be so violent," immediately answered Lady Saxondale in an imploring tone, which sounded singular indeed when coming from her haughty lips. "How can I possibly do it? The police have got the matter in hand—"

"Yes: they have, and you have put them too much on the right scent," at once retorted the woman. "Chiffin—for that's the name of the principal one—is a man too useful to me at times to be parted with so easily—"

"But consider, my good woman," urged Lady Saxondale, "how extraordinary it will seem if I send for the officer who has this matter in hand, and tell him that I would rather put up with the loss of my property than have him proceed farther in the matter. I cannot do it: it would compromise me seriously. Ask what you will for yourself—I will give you more money—"

"No—I am bent on this, and will have it done," rejoined the woman, in

a still more peremptory tone than before. "Don't thwart me, Lady Saxon-dale: or else——"

At this moment Juliana's ear caught the sounds of footsteps ascending the stairs from the servants' offices below; and she was compelled to make a precipitate retreat into the dining-room. Terribly annoyed she was at being thus disturbed in the middle of listening to a discourse so fraught with a strange wild interest, and of which she had just caught a sufficiency of the topic to excite her liveliest curiosity. The little she had heard she at once repeated to her sister; and Constance was astonished at the circumstance of any one possessing the power to dictate in such a way to her mother. Indeed, both the sisters were well-nigh confounded at what had taken place. The object of the woman, even from the little which had been said, was apparent enough: namely, to compel Lady Saxon-dale to put a stop to the search which was being instituted by the police after the men who had broken into the house. Then this woman must be intimately connected with those men? She had indeed said so! Heavens! by what strange circumstance had such a woman acquired any power of influence over the haughty Lady Saxon-dale? Vain and bewildering conjectures!

"Constance," said Juliana, in a tone far more serious and grave than she was often wont to adopt, "I like this circumstance less than anything which has ever yet occurred. The revelations our ears received to-day through the medium of Mr. Gunthorpe, are as nothing in comparison with what we have learnt this evening. That our mother may have conceived an affection for Mr. Deveril is nothing so very remarkable; for she is but a woman after all—and indeed the circumstance becomes utterly insignificant when viewed in contrast with the incident of the last few minutes. It is clear that a woman who is the friend and companion of thieves (and judging from her language most likely a thief herself) can come to Saxon-dale House, and dictate terms in the most peremptory manner to one of the proudest peeresses in the realm! There is something strange and unnatural in all this; and it must be a curious secret which has thus placed our mother in this woman's power."

"A secret, Juliana," returned Constance, with an involuntary shudder, "which it were well for you not to seek to penetrate. Oh! I wish to heaven

that you had taken my advice, and not stolen forth from the room ere now! I am sadly, sadly frightened——"

"Do not be so foolish, Constance," replied Juliana, somewhat sharply. "Whatever this secret may be, I am resolved to penetrate it. Who knows how serviceable the knowledge of it may prove to us?" she added significantly.

"Good heavens! in what sense?" asked Constance, gazing upon her sister with unfeigned surprise.

"Do you not catch my meaning? have we not secrets of our own? Well then, the more we know of our mother's secrets the less can she blame us for whatever she might happen to find out in respect to ourselves."

Constance looked pained and vexed at this answer; and after a pause of nearly a minute, she said in a low hesitating voice, "I think Juliana, that even in the last words you have spoken, there is some hidden meaning which I did not exactly catch."

"My dear girl," replied the elder sister, "we are both in love--and we are both peculiarly situated. If you marry the Marquis of Villebelle, you will be no wife in reality, inasmuch as he has a wife already: and if I marry Francis Paton, I become the laughing stock of all the world. Now, therefore, under such circumstances, it would be by far better for us not to marry at all——"

"What! and renounce our love?" ejaculated Constance. "Oh! if you are so fickle, Juliana, it is widely different with me!"

"I am as far from holding the intention as you are of renouncing this passion of mine," responded Juliana. "I could not do it even if I wished: it is stronger than myself. But I again advise that we should not marry—and also that we keep our loves secret."

"And what do you mean, then?" asked Constance, with fluttering heart and changing colour; for she half suspected the response she would receive.

"Has not our dear mother," returned Juliana, with a laugh of ironical archness, "set us the example how to act? and did not Mr. Gunthorpe predict that we should profit by it? Now, my dear Constance, I have very little doubt in my own mind that Mr. Gunthorpe's prophecy will somehow or another receive its fulfilment."

"Enough, Juliana—enough!" cried

Constance, whose soul retained a sufficiency of its virgin purity to recoil from the suggestions which her elder sister had thus thrown out, and with the indelicacy of which she was truly and sincerely shocked. "Oh, my dear Juliana! I beseech, I implore you, not to allow these thoughts to gain upon you."

"Can you deny, Constance, that you yourself have been somewhat changed by all you overheard this morning from Mr. Gunthorpe's lips in respect to our mother?" asked Juliana.

"No—I could not deny it," replied Constance, murmuringly: and it was with an evident reluctance that she looked inward for a moment to find in the depths of her soul the answer which she thus gave to her sister's question.

"Let us say no more upon the subject now," observed Juliana. "I have no doubt that by this time to-morrow you will have made some progress in your ideas. It has been so with me. Two or three hours back—before dinner—I also repudiated the thought which stole upon me; and now I can look it face to face, deliberately and calmly."

Silence then ensued between the sisters,—Constance falling into a deep and evidently painful reverie. In a few minutes Lady Saxondale returned to the room; and it was with no inconsiderable difficulty that her daughters could prevent themselves from regarding her with a fixedness and intensity of look that might have well excited her suspicion as to the eavesdropping which had been practised by the elder one. Her ladyship was certainly pale, and there was a subdued trouble in her looks—a suppressed terror which could not altogether escape her daughter's notice. But they managed to preserve their countenances in such a way that Lady Saxondale entertained not the slightest suspicion that they had acquired any insight into the scene which had just taken place.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SNARE.

We must now return to Henrietta Leyden, whose mysterious disappearance had plunged her mother into such profound despair. The reader will remember that on the day when

happiness seemed to have re-entered the dwelling of those who had known so much misfortune, Henrietta went forth between three and four o'clock in the afternoon to pay a visit to the Opera,—her object being to leave a note expressive of gratitude for Angela Vivaldi, and also to explain to the ballet-master the circumstances under which she was enabled to retire from a position which had never been to her taste. It will also be recollected that Henrietta was enabled in consequence of the benevolence of Mr. Gunthorpe, to make a considerable improvement in her toilet; and thus was it that in a plain but pretty dress, a simple but becoming bonnet, and a neat shawl, the young damsel tripped gaily along the streets, the lightness of her heart giving a kindred elasticity of her steps.

Sweetly pretty then appeared Henrietta Leyden. Joy was dancing in her mild blue eyes; and instead of a soft melancholy upon her countenance, her features beamed with a light even bordering upon radiance. Then her figure was so admirably set off, in its slender but symmetrical proportions, by the neat and tasteful garb which she wore;—and beneath the skirt of her dress glancingly peeped forth those exquisitely shaped feet and beautifully turned ankles which had so well fitted her for the ballet-dance! Yes—full of happiness was now the heart of the young maiden; and she had forgotten the unpleasant impression made upon her mind by her mother's suspicions when she had returned in the middle of the night with Angela Vivaldi's gold in her hand. Still, notwithstanding the halo of happiness which surrounded her, Henrietta's demeanour retained that modest reserve and bashful timidity which belonged to the purity of her character; and though in her beauty there was attraction for the gaze of the libertine, yet in her manner there was no encouragement for his advances."

Henrietta reached the Opera, and entered the building as usual by the stage door. To some official did she entrust her note for Signora Vivaldi; and she passed onward, through the labyrinthine corridors, to the stage in order to speak to the ballet-master. Three or four male loungers were standing in the wings witnessing the evolutions of the half-dozen ballet-

girls who were practising at the time upon the stage; but Henrietta threw not more than a passing glance upon those loungers—and hurrying timidly by, fearful of some familiarity or insult at their hands, entered on the back part of the stage.

In a few minutes the ballet-master observed the damsel; and beckoning her towards him, said in a somewhat angry manner, "How is it, Miss Leyden, that you were not here at three o'clock according to my direction? You know that you are yet very imperfect in the *pirouette*, and also—But I see," he suddenly interrupted himself, as he noticed the change in her apparel, "you are like the rest of them, I suppose, and have now got your head turned with fine garments."

"You wrong, sir," replied Henrietta, the blood rushing to her cheeks "I came to apologise for not being here at the hour named, and to explain that the same cause which prevented me from attending according to your directions, will enable me, I hope, to leave the stage for ever."

"And that cause?" said the ballet-master inquiringly, but neither superciliously nor insolently: for there was something in the young girl's manner, as well as a sincerity in her look and her accents, which made him hesitate ere he yielded to the belief that she had followed the usual course and accepted the overtures of some libertine lover.

"As I do not wish, sir," rejoined Henrietta, "to incur the evil suspicions of yourself or any one acquainted with me here, I am glad that you question me thus. Heaven has sent a kind friend to the succour of my poor invalid mother, my little brother, and myself."

"But who is this friend?" asked the ballet-master, his curiosity being excited.

"Oh! such a benevolent, kind-hearted, but eccentric old gentleman," returned Henrietta. "I do not know his name: but he is coming at six o'clock to conduct us all away from our present wretched abode to a more comfortable lodging. He has taken compassion upon us, and has already given the most generous proofs of his friendship."

There was the unsophisticated communicativeness of true gratitude on the part of the young girl, which allowed no scope for questioning her sincerity. She evidently experienced

a pure and holy joy in thus dilating upon the bounties of which herself and those who were so dear to her had become the object. It would have been impossible for even the most suspicious individual, and one who put no confidence in the virtue of the female sex, to doubt the truth of Miss Leyden's artless narrative. The ballet-master, who certainly had little faith in the morals of opera dancers generally, nevertheless believed every syllable which Henrietta spoke; and with a somewhat kinder tone than he had ever addressed her in before, he said, "I wish you well, and hope that everything will turn out for the best."

She thanked him for his good wishes; and having taken leave of him, stayed but a few minutes more to bid farewell to some of the ballet-dancers who accosted her, and who were curious to learn wherefore she was going to leave the Opera. She gave the same explanation she had just given to the ballet-master, and then hastened away.

Amongst those individuals whom we mentioned as lounging in the precincts of the stage, was one of whom it is necessary to say a few words. He was a man of about forty years of age—of sedate and even dignified appearance—dressed in black, and looking thoroughly respectable. His white cravat and the absence of any shirt-collar gave him a certain air of sanctimoniousness: so that he seemed considerably out of place loitering in the wings of the Opera and gazing at the ballet-dancers.

This individual immediately recognized Henrietta Leyden, though she knew him not; and even if she had bestowed on him a more observing look as she passed him by, she would not have remembered ever to have seen him before. He however had seen her—knew full well who she was—and had his own reasons for being secretly rejoiced at encountering her there on the present occasion. He overheard every syllable which passed between herself and the ballet-master; and the circumstances of her simple narrative furnished him with a suggestion on which he at once resolved to act. Accordingly, while Henrietta lingered behind for the additional few minutes to converse with her late companions of the ballet, the individual of whom we have been speaking hurried away from the precincts of the stage; and threading the long winding

corridors, emerged from the building by the stage door in the Haymarket.

There he waited till Henrietta Leyden made her appearance; and the moment she issued from the theatre, the individual in question accosted her with every appearance of anxious haste.

"You are Miss Leyden, I presume?" he said, in that quick tone and with that bustling manner which were full well calculated to throw her off her guard and make her at once fall into the snare which he was laying for her.

"Yes—that is my name," she answered, surveying him with mingled surprise and suspense.

"I thought so," he exclaimed. "You were so well described to me—"

"By whom?" she asked, her suspense now mingled with alarm lest something had happened at home.

"By him who has sent me hither—your benefactor—the old gentleman who visited your lodging just now, and who promised to return for you at six o'clock—"

"And he has sent you for me?" cried Henrietta. "Is there aught amiss?"

"No, nothing. Reassure yourself; be not alarmed. Everything is well. The explanation of my presence here is that your benefactor returned to your lodgings sooner than he intended, having an appointment for this evening which he had previously forgotten:—and he has taken your mother and brother away to the new place provided for you all."

"How kind! how generous!" ejaculated Henrietta. "But was he angry that I had gone out?"

"Angry—no! But as it is not necessary for you to return to your old lodging, he has sent me to escort you to your new one. Come quick, Miss, for I know that his time is precious—and as I have to accompany him elsewhere, he will be waiting for me."

"I would not tax his patience for the world," said Henrietta.

During this rapid colloquy her companion had led a little way up the street; and now he at once summoned a vehicle from the public stand. With every appearance of haste he himself officially opened the door ere the driver could jump down: Henrietta was promptly handed in—her companion gave some quick instructions, spoken aside, to the coachman—then he entered the vehicle—the door was

closed—the man leapt up again to his box—and away they went.

All that we have described, from the first instant that the individual accosted Henrietta at the door of the Opera to that moment when she found herself seated by his side in the vehicle—had passed with such rapidity that she had not leisure for the slightest reflection. Her ideas had been kept in a whirl by the hurried, bustling, and almost anxiously impatient manner of her companion; so that there was not even a moment's leisure for a suspicion to start up in her mind. Nor for the first ten minutes during which the vehicle sped rapidly along, did her companion allow her time to give way to reflection; but he went on expatiating upon the philanthropy of her benefactor, the many charities which he practised, the vast amount of good he did, and the delight he took in succouring the unfortunate. The young damsel was naturally charmed at hearing such encomia lavished upon the old gentleman; but gradually the thought stole into her mind that her present companion had not once mentioned the said old gentleman's name. Then, for the first time during this interview, she began to regard with some degree of attention the person seated by her side. When however she saw how respectable was his appearance, how free from anything savouring of treachery were his looks—and with what respectful sympathy he appeared to regard her, she again felt perfectly reassured. Then she ventured to ask where her new abode was situated; and her companion at once informed her that it was in one of the most delightful suburbs of London—namely, near the village of Hornsey. Henrietta thereupon remarked that it was very considerate on the part of her generous benefactor to have chosen so salubrious a spot for her invalid mother; and this observation again furnished her companion with a topic for expatiation. In this manner he continued talking until the outskirts of London were reached on the northern side, and the vehicle was rolling along the road to Hornsey.

Now again did the young damsel begin to experience a revival of that vague misgiving which had previously arisen in her mind. Insensibly the idea stole upon her that her companion sustained so rapid and continuous a discourse in order to keep her attention engaged; and as this idea gained

upon her, she could not help throwing at him dubious and uneasy looks. These however he did not appear to notice, but sought fresh topics for conversation; and though Henrietta had by this time ceased to answer him through the influence of her augmenting terrors, he still went on as volubly as ever.

Her alarm grew to an almost intolerable pitch. A secret voice whispered in the depths of her soul that all was not right: indeed she felt like one betrayed into a snare. Again did she glance at her companion; and now she thought there was something sinister beneath the sedateness of his looks. But what was she to do? Suppose that, after all, everything he had said was correct, how insulting would it be alike to him and her benefactor if she were to manifest the suspicions which were so rapidly acquiring strength in her bosom? Henrietta accordingly made up her mind to see the adventure to its issue, no matter what that result might be; and she even endeavoured to appear cheerful and gay and to resume her part in the discourse, so as to prevent her companion from fathoming her uneasiness.

The village of Hornsey was reached; and the vehicle, turning into a diverging road, stopped at the gate of a large and handsome-looking house. It stood a little way back and was so embowered in tall and thickly umbrageous trees, that all its extent could not be immediately discerned: but when the gate was opened by a gardener who was at work on the premises, and the vehicle passed up the shady avenue to the portico in front of the house, Henrietta at once found herself at the entrance of a mansion. The poignancy of her suspicions now shot with a galvanic pang through her heart: but the very next instant an idea sprang up in her mind giving incalculable relief. What if the mansion really belonged to her benefactor, and that in the carrying out of his generous purposes he had resolved to afford her invalid mother, herself, and her little brother a home in this healthfully situated dwelling?

But she had not time for any farther reflection; her companion had sprung out of the vehicle, and giving her his hand, assisted her also to alight. Painfully balanced between hope and fear—trembling to advance, yet not daring to retreat—Henrietta stood for a few moments on the steps of the portico; and then, making up her mind with a

desperate effort, she suffered herself to be conducted into the mansion.

A servant in splendid livery held the front door open; and she found herself in a hall paved with marble and embellished with statues. A noble ascent of staircase faced the front entrance; and a side door which stood open revealed the interior of a sumptuously furnished parlour. In short, the very first glimpse which the damsel thus obtained of these features of the mansion, showed her that it was evidently the abode of wealth and luxury, and her heart sank within her. For now rushed the idea to her mind that it was by no means probable any man—and that man a complete stranger—would do so extraordinary generous a deed as to transfer herself and her relatives from a wretched attic to a palatial residence. It was a philanthropy belonging to romance and not to reality, such a change as one might read of in fairy tales, but not such as was wont to happen in the true world. All this occurred to Henrietta's mind in a moment; and she turned her terrified looks upon her companion. Now she thought she beheld a sardonic kind of smile blinding indescribably with the sedateness of his countenance; and she felt inclined to cry out—but fear choked her utterance. At that instant a door facing the one which stood open, afforded egress to an individual whom she instantaneously recognized but too well; and all her terrors being confirmed in a moment, she gave vent to a wild shriek—burst from the hold of her companion—and sprang towards the front door. But the footman in the gorgeous livery banged it violently; and the dread conviction smote her heart that she was a prisoner!

Almost frantic—with frenzied look and reeling brain—she turned round towards the individual whom she had recognized: but a sudden dizziness came over her—she staggered—mechanically extended her arms to clutch at something that might save her from falling—and was received in the embrace of Lord Everton!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BEECH-TREE LODGE.

Yes—it was a house belonging to Lord Everton to which Henrietta Leyden had thus been brought: he it was whom she had at once recognized as he issued from the apartment opening into the hall; and in his arms was it that she was received when consciousness abandoned her.

Let us pause for a few moments to give some necessary particulars. The individual who had entrapped the young damsel to Beech-Tree Lodge—for so the mansion was named—was a confidential person in the service of his lordship. His name was Bellamy—Mark Bellamy, as he was generally called by his patron. In certain respects he was treated with the familiarity of an equal and was ostensibly the master of the house, as will hereafter be explained—though in reality it was Lord Everton's. Bellamy was a factotum—the ready instrument whereby Everton was enabled to carry out many of his dark unhallowed purposes; and being deep in his lordship's confidence, he was largely recompensed. Though not exactly a gentleman by birth, he had nevertheless received a tolerably good education, and was of manners sufficiently agreeable: in addition to which, he possessed the consummate art of adapting himself to all circumstances and persons, as occasion might require. Having seen much of the world, he possessed a large experience in all its vices, hypocrisies, and villainies; and beneath the mask of a dour, sedateness, assisted by a sanctimonious style of apparel, he concealed a disposition of the most heartless kind and a character stained by countless iniquities. Some weeks previously to the time of which we are writing, Lord Everton had mentioned to him the name of Henrietta Leyden, and had promised him a handsome reward if he would by any possible treachery manage to inveigle that young girl to Beech-Tree Lodge. Everton was so good a paymaster, and especially so bounteous where the gratification of his detestable passions was concerned, that Mark Bellamy had resolved to seize an early opportunity of directing his attention to the matter. Having made himself acquainted with Henrietta's personal appearance, he determined to watch her movements, and had accordingly proceeded, that very day of which we are speaking, to the Opera House in

the Haymarket, to glean whatsoever might be useful to him in the furtherance of his design. We have seen how, by a coincidence, the train of circumstances favoured his views. The tale which he overheard Henrietta tell the ballet-master, at once suggested to the fertile brain of Mark Bellamy a means of carrying out the enterprise; and he accomplished his purpose with success. As a matter of course he knew nothing of the Leydens' benefactor; and his elaborate expatiation upon that gentleman's virtues were indeed intended as Henrietta had surmised, to engross her attention and divert her thoughts from flowing into channels of suspicion and mistrust.

We may now pursue the thread of our story. When the unhappy girl came to herself, she found that she was reclining upon a sofa in that room whose sumptuous interior had caught her eyes when first entering the hall of the mansion. A middle-aged female, who had evidently been administering restoratives, was standing near. Henrietta threw a terrified look around in the expectation of observing the detested old nobleman: but it was some relief to her distressed feelings to discover that she was alone in that room with the woman standing near her. A ray of hope flashed in upon her. Surely one of her own sex would not prove inaccessible to her entreaties for release? Inspired by the thought, she looked up into the woman's countenance to see if its aspect justified her hope: but this survey was only destined to experience the bitterest disappointment.

The woman was about six-and-forty years of age; and her features which had evidently once been exceedingly handsome, bore the marks of the insatiate passions which had furrowed those lineaments long before the hand of time could have begun to trace deep wrinkles there. Even to the innocent and inexperienced mind of the young maiden, that countenance betrayed the evil nature of the woman's heart: it was the scorched, seared and ruined veil which instead of concealing, afforded an index to the desecration of the shrine within. Her hair was streaked with silver, but gave no venerable appearance to the face: on the contrary, it seemed a part of the remains of a beauty which even in the days of its

glory had been fearful in itself, because associated with passions of the fiercest and most ungovernable nature. Her dark eyes still shone with a remnant of their former fires, but subdued to a lurid light, and at times bursting forth in sinister flashes, like the flame of a volcano seen through the pitchy darkness of night of storm. Altogether she was a woman who appeared utterly incapable of one generous feeling—one holy idea—one tender sympathy: and it was in mingled horror and despair that poor Henrietta Leyden averted her looks and gave vent to her feelings in a sudden burst of anguish.

"Now understand me, my pretty dear," said the woman, in a voice which had that loss of harmony almost amounting to hoarseness which is so frequently the result of a dissipated life on the part of females,—"it is not of the slightest use for you to give way to any silly grief. Here you are—and here you will stop as long as it pleases his lordship: but I dare say that before long it will suit you well enough to remain here of your own accord."

"No—never, never!" shrieked forth Henrietta, as she sprang in wild frenzy from the sofa. "I would sooner perish than stoop to dishonour—"

"Dishonour indeed!" echoed the woman, her thin withered lips wreathing in supreme contempt mingled with scorn: "have you got that silly word so ready for use on the tip of your tongue? Know you that it is mere idle cant to use it? Dishonour indeed! If there be dishonour at all in the world, it is only to be found attached to poverty; and it is from poverty that you may be lifted up if you choose. However, we will not talk more upon the subject at present. I dare say that we shall have plenty of opportunities of expressing our opinions together on this and other points ere we separate."

"And is it really your intention," asked Henrietta, utterly reduced to despair by those last words which augured a long captivity for her, "to keep me a prisoner here in defiance of the law?"

"The law!" echoed the woman, with another scornful look, and this time it was accompanied by a still more sardonic laugh. "The law is only made to coerce the poor, and not to restrain the rich."

"Heavens! into whose power have I fallen!" cried Henrietta, wringing

her hands in anguish as she sat down again on the sofa: for it really seems to her as if a fiend in human shape and not one of her own sex, were flinging these proud defiance alike of virtue and of legality.

"You have fallen into the hands of a nobleman who will ensure you against want for the rest of your days and lavish all the advantages of wealth upon you," returned the woman "provided that you willingly accept the destiny marked out for you. But if, on the other hand, you play the silly prude—However, I will not threaten you in respect to that alternative: because you have not been in the house as yet a quarter of an hour, and have passed through a fainting fit during that brief interval."

"Now listen to me," said Henrietta, suddenly wiping the tears from her eyes and speaking with firmness and energy. "I have a mother who has been very, very ill, and whose health is still most precarious. My prolonged absence from her may be followed by fatal consequences. I have a little brother, only seven years old; and if anything should happen to my poor mother, who is to take care of him while I am in captivity here? I conjure you, if you have the slightest spark of feeling in your breast, to suffer me to go hence; and I declare solemnly that I will take no step to punish the authors of this outrage. But if you refuse this prayer which I offer up I warn you that I will exert every effort to summon succour to my aid. My screams and shrieks shall pierce beyond these walls—there are other houses at no great distance—the passers-by in the road must likewise hear me—Or if these means fail, then will I watch the first opportunity to precipitate myself from a window, no matter what height from the ground. In short, I am desperate! You may think me a weak and powerless young girl; but the maddening nature of my thoughts will inspire me with the strength and the courage of a giantess!"

"All this is remarkably fine, very heroic, and very romantic indeed," observed the woman, with the cold irony of disdain. "The only misfortune is that your appeal to my sympathy is as useless as if you addressed yourself to one of the statues in the hall; and the accomplishment of your threats will prove somewhat more difficult than you imagine."

"Good heavens!" cried the wretched Henrietta, "is it possible that any one in female shape can proclaim herself as heartless as the cold insensate marble? Woman, you must be a fiend—you must be a fiend!" she added, with an outburst of uncontrollable vehemence. "And as for what I have threatened to do, you cannot prevent me—no, you cannot prevent me! My screams shall raise the whole neighbourhood!"

With these words, uttered in wild frenzy, Henrietta sprang towards the nearest window: but she recoiled with a sudden horror on observing that it was well provided with iron bars. Her agonizing glance was flung towards the two other windows which belonged to the same room; and at each did she observe a similar grating. Just heaven! where was she? what prison was this? Reeling half round, with frightful dizziness in her brain, the unhappy girl staggered to a seat, on which she sank down; and at the same moment the mocking laugh of that fiend-like woman rang in her ears.

"Now, Miss Loyden," said this dreadful creature, "do you begin to understand that your threats are all as ridiculous as your own silly prudery? There is not a window in the house which is not thus defended with iron bars; and therefore you will be spared the disagreeable alternative of self-destruction. As for your screams, you are quite welcome to open one of those windows and shriek forth till you lose your voice altogether. I can assure you that none of the neighbours will think of coming to your assistance. They will only wonder what poor maniac has been brought hither."

"A maniac!" echoed Henrietta, springing up from her seat as if galvanized with the light of the horrid truth which now flashed to her mind: "a maniac, did you say? What house then is this?"—and her voice sank to a subdued and awe-inspired lowness of tone as she put the question.

"I do not intend to be too communicative my pretty dear," responded the woman: "but it may be that Mr. Bellamy—that is the gentleman who brought you hither—keeps a private lunatic asylum where he from time to time receives patients—"

"Enough, enough!" interrupted Henrietta, hysterically; and again sinking down upon the seat, she covered her face with her hands, the

tears gushing forth between her fingers.

"So you perceive," continued the woman, who appeared to take a devilish delight in making known to the young lady the utter hopelessness of her position, "that you will not be gratified with the facility of leaping from a window: nor will it be worth while to spoil your sweet voice by ineffectual screams. I would advise you to compose yourself—to make up your mind to the destiny which is inevitably yours; and whenever you think fit, I will conduct you to the apartments which you are to occupy. You need not hurry yourself, unless you like: I am in no hurry myself. Therefore, whether you come now or two or three hours hence, not of the smallest consequence to me."

Henrietta pressed her fingers to her throbbing brows, and endeavoured to steady her thoughts. She saw the inutility of giving way to her anguish; and as the hope of escape was the only one which now remained to her, she thought that the sooner she made herself acquainted with the quarters to be assigned to her, the better. She accordingly wiped her eyes—struggled with a powerful effort to subdue the violence of her grief—and intimated to the woman that she was ready to accompany her.

"Just as you please," was the cold ironical answer: and she who gave it forthwith conducted the young captive out of the room.

They passed into the hall, and thence ascended that handsome flight of stairs already mentioned. They reached a landing adorned with statues, vases, and paintings, and whence three or four doors opened into the apartments on that storey.

But there they halted not: another ascent was mounted—another landing reached. Here the woman paused for a moment, and glanced along the array of four doors which appeared on that storey, as if she hesitated to which apartment she should assign the youthful prisoner. Her decision was however promptly made; and opening one of the doors, she conducted Henrietta into a suite of three rooms, beautifully furnished.

These rooms opened one into another, and had no visible issue except the door on the landing by which they had just entered. The first apartment was evidently fitted up as the one where meals might be taken; the next

was to serve the purpose of drawing-room: and the third was a bed-chamber. They all three had a bed-chamber. They all three had their windows at the back of the house: and these windows were barred. But the view therefrom was far more cheerful than that which the front of the house commanded: for these windows looked upon a beautiful garden in the rear of the building, stretching out to a considerable extent, and bounded by a shrubbery of evergreens, beyond which lay the green fields of the open country; and as all that neighbourhood is characterised by picturesque scenery, the view from the windows was altogether exceedingly beautiful. But what view can possess any charms for the captive who gazes upon it between iron bars?

"These are your apartments," said the woman. "In the cupboards and drawers of the bed-chamber you will find plenty of changes of raiment, some of which will fit you as exquisitely as if made by a milliner to your shape. The toilet-table affords all appropriate requirements. In each room there are bell-pulls; and your summons will always be promptly answered. Your table shall be served with all dainties: everything shall be done to render you cheerful and contented, unless you resolve to be doggedly obstinate and perverse. In the middle room you may observe a number of books, some of which must doubtless suit your taste. When it strikes your fancy to take exercise, there is the garden at your service. All these pieces of information I give you by Lord Everton's command. There is no attempt to disguise from you the fact that you are a prisoner, at least for the present; but how long you may remain so, depends entirely upon yourself. You comprehend me? and therefore your destiny is thus in your own hands, that whereas you are now a captive in this house, you may become the free and happy mistress of it whenever you think fit. I need say no more."

The woman had been permitted to make this long speech without the slightest interruption of Henrietta's part, because the young damsel was under the influence of too profound a terror—too paralyzing a consternation, to be able to interject a single word or comment. She sat down in a dull dumb stupor,—her eyes fixed vacantly in the direction of the window, beyond the iron bars of which stretch-

ed the smiling country, the verdure of the fields and trees all brilliant and glowing in the sunlight of the delicious summer evening. But Henrietta beheld not now that charming panorama of natural loveliness, dotted here and there with country mansions or picturesque cottage; the whole powers of her vision were turned inward, in concentrated survey of her own sad and well-nigh hopeless position.

The woman, perhaps imagining that the young captive had fallen into a fit of sullenness, turned slowly away, and passed out of the suite of rooms. As the outer door closed Henrietta started up and listened. It was to catch whether that door was locked or bolted upon her. Poor thing; as if those who had taken the trouble to put bars up at the windows would forget to secure the door of the cage to which the young fluttering bird was consigned! Yes; the sounds of the key turning and the bolts drawing, reached the damsel's ears; and then, with a sudden outburst of anguish, she wrung her hands violently, her bosom convulsing with sobs and her lips pouring forth the bitterest lamentations.

Oh! how dreary and dismal were the thoughts which now agitated in the brain of poor Henrietta. Would not her mother indeed have every apparent reason to suspect the worse,—she who was already so prone to suspicion! Crucifying reflection!—and heaven only knew how long a period was to elapse ere Henrietta would see her mother again, and be enabled to tell all that had occurred. And, alas! still more excruciating reflection!—was it destined that she should ultimately go forth pure and stainless from this mansion of infamy? or would not her ruin be assuredly consummated?

Unable to endure the torturing poignancy of these thoughts Henrietta endeavoured to distract her attention by examining the apartments to which she had been consigned. She had another reason for entering on this survey: namely, to ascertain what chances there might be of a surprise on the part of Lord Everton during the night that was approaching. The reader has doubtless well comprehended that it was a range of three rooms opening one into another, and entirely shut in from the rest of the house by the door that opened from the landing. She looked to see if there were any means of securing this door

inside; and she found that there were. Yes: there was one of those little sliding bolts at the bottom part of the lock; and when this was secured, the door could not be opened from without save by violence, and therefore with a noise which could not fail to awaken her.

But was there no other means of communication with this suite of apartments? Minute and careful was Henrietta's scrutinizing search throughout the three rooms; but no other door save those between the apartments themselves, or of the cupboards in the bed-chamber, could she find. She examined the walls—likewise the wood-work inside the cupboards—looked under the bed and behind it—in short, left not a single nook or corner uninvestigated.

The result of this search was so far of an encouraging nature that she felt tolerably sure no attempt to surprise her in the night would be made; and indeed, when she reviewed all that the woman had said to her, she came to the conclusion that it was Lord Everton's hope either to weary or persuade her into a compliance with his wishes. If such were the case, it at least promised her some days' leisure to devise means for escape; and feeling that this was her only chance, she said to herself, "It is unless for me to give way to grief,—indeed worse than useless: for the result must be the exhaustion of my physical powers and the prostration of my mental ones. Let me summon all my fortitude to my aid: for heaven only helps those who help themselves—and they who yield to despondency and despair, go half way towards meeting the crowning calamity."

Strengthened by these reflections, Henrietta grew more calm. She surveyed the prospect from the window, and then turned to examine the contents of the book-shelves. There were novels and poems, and travels, and some of the annuals,—in short, a miscellaneous collection of works, some of which were sufficiently suited to her taste. She took down a volume, and endeavoured to read: but her thoughts were not yet properly collected, nor her mind adequately tranquillized, for such employment. She therefore laid aside the book, and gazed forth again from the windows.

She heard the village-church of Hornsey proclaim the hour of seven: and then the outer door of her apart-

ments was opened. A female servant made her appearance, bearing a tea tray. Henrietta was greatly relieved on observing that it was not the same fearful-looking woman whom she had previously seen; but still there was nothing in the appearance of this servant to give her any hope of making her a friend. She was a thin, sharp-visaged, cross-looking woman, of about thirty—with that decided compression of the lips which seemed to imply that she thought it probable the young captive might appeal to her, but that she had a negative answer ready to give.

Henrietta did not therefore speak a word to this woman; but when she had retired the young damsel gladly partook of the refreshing beverage she had brought up. In half an-hour the servant returned to take away the things; and she then said, "It was his lordship's intention to pay his respects to you this evening, but sudden business has compelled him to go into town, and therefore you will not see him till tomorrow."

"Does his lordship habitually live here?" asked Henrietta.

"No—of course not. I suppose you are aware that he has got a beautiful house in Belgrave Square."

"I know nothing of his lordship's circumstances," said Henrietta. "Pray who is the person who brought me up to these rooms?"

"Oh! the housekeeper, you mean," rejoined the servant, with a peculiar expression of countenance as she spoke. "You may call her Mrs. Martin when you want to address her by name; and, for my part, I answer to the name of Susan. Your's, I believe, is Miss Leyden?"

"Yes," replied Henrietta; then after a pause she asked, though somewhat hesitatingly. "Are there many people in this house? I mean any others besides myself—in the same position?"

Susan looked very hard at Henrietta for a few moments, as if to fathom her reason for asking this question; and then she abruptly replied, "No—none." There was another brief pause; and then she asked, "At what time do you like to have supper? and have you any particular orders to give about it?"

"I shall require nothing more this evening," responded Henrietta.

The woman took up the tea tray and issued from the room, locking and bolting the door behind her.

Two more hours passed, tediously and anxiously enough: for Henrietta could not help keeping her thoughts constantly riveted upon her mother and brother, who must be so cruelly afflicted at her absence. And then her benefactor, too, —that old gentleman with whose name she herself was unacquainted,—what would he think of her disappearance? Would he still carry out his benevolent plans in respect to providing a new lodging for her invalid mother and little Charlie? or would he look with so much suspicion on her mysterious disappearance as to abandon in disgust any farther development of his charity in that quarter?

We need not however dwell any longer upon poor Henrietta's reflections: the reader can be at no loss to imagine what she felt or endured in the first hours of her captivity.

At nine o'clock, when the dusk set in, Susan made her appearance with candles, and also with a tray covered with sandwiches, cakes, fruits, and wine,—intimating "that Mrs. Martin had ordered her to bring up these refreshments in case Miss Leyden might choose to partake of them." She then asked if he required anything more; and on receiving a reply in the negative, wished Henrietta good night and departed.

The young damsel now secured the door by means of the sliding bolt above referred to; and as an additional precaution she placed a chair slantwise against the lock. When the clock of Hornsey church struck ten, she resolved to retire for the night; she was thoroughly exhausted in mind and body, and was moreover anxious to seek refuge from her unpleasant reflections in the oblivion of slumber. The door of communication between the dining room and drawing-room was furnished with a key—and she therefore locked it. In the same manner did she secure the door between the drawing-room and the bed-chamber; and thus she felt assured that her rest could not possibly be disturbed by any stealthy intrusion.

Laid aside her apparel and said vers, Henrietta sought her couch, notwithstanding the bitterness of the night, sleep soon fell upon

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCES.

How long she had slept she knew not; but she awoke suddenly and with a feeling of terror, as if pursued by the influence of some unpleasant dream—or else startled by some noise in the room—she could not tell which. She had extinguished the candle ere retiring to rest: but the night being clear and beautiful, and the windows draped only with muslin curtains, all objects were perfectly visible in the room. Her eyes were cast around with that feeling of terror in the midst of which she had awokened: but she beheld nothing to justify her alarms. Still that terror was upon her—positive and real in its painful sensation—but vague and undefined as to its cause. The perspiration was standing out in large drops upon her forehead; and she felt the cold tremor of consternation all over her. Then she strove to recollect what she had been dreaming of: but she could not remember that she had been dreaming at all. She lay perfectly still, unable to move a limb, and with all the sensations of having experienced some alarm, either in a vision or by the unknown circumstance that had thus startlingly awokened her.

Perhaps five minutes might have elapsed while she was in this state of consternation; and then she heard a strange rustling of clothes in the room. Yes—she distinctly heard it; and the flesh crept upon her bones—her hair stood up by the roots—the perspiration broke out again, cold and clammy upon her. But now all was silent once more. What could it be? Suspense grew intolerable—and yet she dared not spring from the bed to search if any one were in the room. For another minute a solemn silence lasted; and then she again heard the rustling of garments, and distinctly beheld one of the half-drawn curtains at the foot of the bed slowly pulled back. Her eyes were riveted in awful terror upon the spot; and then she perceived a human shape appear in the opening between the curtains. She endeavoured to shriek out—but her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth: she could not avert her eyes even if she had wished to do so. The shape was that of a man enveloped in a dressing gown gathered by a cord at the waist; but for the first few moments Henrietta could not see

his face clearly in consequence of the shade of the curtains. Slowly however he bent forward; and then his countenance was revealed—but, Oh! a countenance so ghastly pale, so sad and mournful in its look, that the young damsel felt convinced it was some apparition from the other world that was thus gazing upon her. She gave one gasping moan of ineffable horror—and her senses abandoned her.

When she awoke again, the sun was shining—the room was filled with light—the birds were singing in the trees of the garden—and everything seemed cheerful and gay. The horrible and mysterious incident of the night arose in her memory; and shudderingly she flung her looks around with the dread of again beholding that unearthly figure. But she saw nothing to terrify her. She sat up in bed—gazed more searchingly about—and gathering courage, descended from the couch. Still she saw nothing to revive her terrors. She glanced towards the door—it was shut; and a closer examination showed her that it was locked as she had left it. Now she began to suspect that what she had beheld was merely in a dream; and yet she was slow and hesitating in her progress to such a conclusion, inasmuch as every detail of the occurrence was so vividly impressed upon her mind. She remembered having been awakened—remembered also the terror she had then experienced, as if from the instinctive knowledge that there was something dreadful in the room even before it had looked in upon her between the curtains. She remembered likewise its shape, and that sad pale face which had bent forward towards her.

But was it not possible that though she might have awakened in terror under the influence of some unpleasant dream, she had gone to sleep again and had then in another dream, or in continuation of the former one, seen the figure which was so impressed upon her memory? This was indeed the only rational solution of the mystery: for however deeply her superstitious terrors might have been aroused in the solemn silence and semi-obscurity of the night, Henrietta was by no means inclined to put faith in apparitions now that the sun was shining, the birds were singing, and nature seemed so gay and cheerful without. She never had believed in spirits—she could not now: but if it

were not a spirit, it could scarcely have been a living figure, because there was not the slightest indication of how it could have obtained ingress to the room, or have effected its egress. The door was locked, and there seemed no other door save those of the cupboards in the chamber.

Henrietta passed into the drawing-room, and found the door at the farther extremity likewise locked as she had left it. She proceeded on into the dining-room, and found the outer door also as she had left it. The sliding-bolt was fast, and the chair was slantwise against the lock.

"Then assuredly it was a dream!" said Henrietta to herself. "But how singular a dream—impressed with all the vividness of reality! No wonder is it if weak-minded persons, after such a dream as this, should entertain the ineradicable conviction they have seen spirits from the other world!"

But even while thus coming to the conclusion that it was naught save a dream, Henrietta Leyden experienced a lingering doubt—a latent uncertainty, in the depth of her soul. There was moreover a depression of spirits, altogether apart from the influence of the thoughts excited by her captive position. Her nerves had been shaken, and on returning to her bed-chamber to perform her toilet, she found herself every now and then looking anxiously around with the apprehension of seeing that shape, with its pale and melancholy countenance, standing behind her. She examined the bed-curtains; and though it certainly struck her that one at the foot of the couch had been drawn back somewhat more than it was when she retired to rest, yet she could not be positive on this point.

Having dressed herself, she removed the chair from the outer door of her suite of apartments; and soon afterwards Susan made her appearance with the breakfast-tray. The table was speedily spread with a most tempting repast, if the poor girl had experienced any appetite for the viands thus served up: but a cup of tea and a piece of bread-and-butter were the sustenance she could take. She longed to communicate to Susan the incident of the past night: she not only felt that it would be a relief to unbosom herself in that respect, but she likewise experienced a secret anxiety to ascertain whether the

woman could help her in accounting for the occurrence in a natural way, otherwise than by attributing it to a dream—in short, if it were possible that any one could have intruded into her chamber. But when she looked at the forbidding countenance of the servant, and remarked the decisive compression of her lips, her entire air repelling any advances towards friendly or familiar intercourse,—the poor girl was constrained to hold her peace and ponder the matter in her own mind,

After breakfast Mrs. Martin ascended to Henrietta's rooms. The young damsel recoiled with an ill-concealed aversion from the presence of this woman, whom, although she knew nothing of her, she could not help associating with everything vile and depraved. Indeed, such was the impression that Mrs. Martin's looks were but too well calculated to leave upon the mind; and Henrietta would much rather have remained in the companionship of her own thoughts than have the society of this woman forced upon her.

"I am come to ascertain whether you have found everything comfortable, and also, to inquire into your present frame of mind:"—and as Mrs. Martin thus spoke, she fixed her searching eyes earnestly upon the young captive.

"You may surround me with all the riches of the universe," was the reply; "but they would give me no comfort in my present position. As for the state of my mind, it is not to be comprehended by one who has admitted herself to be inaccessible to sympathy as a marble statue."

"At all events, your spirit is not broken, Miss," said the woman, with that same biting irony which she had displaced on the preceding evening.

Henrietta gave no answer: she did not choose to be drawn into a war of words nor an altercation with Mrs. Martin.

"I am sorry to see that you are alike obstinate and perverse," resumed this woman, "but such a humour will in no respect tend to your tranquillity. Lord Everton will be here by midday: he will see you then—and I should advise you to treat him kindly."

"Infamous woman!" ejaculated Henrietta, her cheeks becoming crimson and her eyes flashing fire:—those eyes that were wont to beam with so mild and serene a light. "It is im-

possible not to comprehend the detestable meaning which is clothed in your words. If you yourself are utterly callous to all ideas of virtue, at least do not think so ill of your sex as to imagine that *all* are equally infamous."

"These are harsh words, young woman," said Mrs. Martin, as she bit her other lip, and her eyes for a moment glared fiercely upon the young captive: then suddenly conquering her excitement, she said, "Am I to understand then that you do not choose to be on friendly terms with me?"

Henrietta flung a glance of disgust at the woman, and then said, "If you purpose to remain here, be so kind as to decide in which of the three rooms you choose to sit."

"So that you may seek another?" was Mrs. Martin's bitterly uttered response. "But no—it is not my purpose to force my society upon you. Perhaps the time will come when you yourself will seek it. For mark me, Henrietta Loydon! a prisoner are you here to remain so long as you refuse the overtures of Lord Everton; and when the days hang wearisomely long upon your hands, you will welcome my presence with gladness."

"Never!" was Henrietta's emphatic response.

The woman threw upon her a mocking glance, and then took her departure, locking and bolting the door behind her.

In nervous suspense did Henrietta await the threatened visit from Lord Everton; and when she heard the clock of Hornsey church proclaim the hour of noon, her excitement rose to a pitch that was almost intolerable. She could not settle her mind to the adoption of any particular course. At one instant she resolved to overwhelm him with reproaches—at another to throw herself at his feet and beseech him to restore her to liberty. Then she thought that she would do well to array herself in the garb of hypocrisy, and by holding out hopes of eventual surrender throw him off his guard and obtain relaxations of her imprisonment which might furnish an opportunity of escape. But against this project the purity of her soul revolted: she could not bring herself to play such a game of duplicity,—and moreover, on second thoughts, she doubted whether it would succeed with one so

wary and experienced in all degrees of cunning as Lord Everton.

Thus, when that nobleman made his appearance shortly after midday, Henrietta was in that nervous agitated state which left her altogether undecided in what manner to receive the author of her present sufferings. His lordship has already been described to the reader as an old man of about sixty-five, made up with all succedaneous contrivances and with all the artifices of the toilet, so as to wear a youthful appearance. Not only was he one of the richest but also one of the most depraved and profligate members of the aristocracy; and a long career of crime, practised with impunity, had rendered him bold and daring in adopting the means to gratify his passions. For this sole purpose indeed did he seem to exist—, regarding wealth only as the instrument whereby the aim was to be accomplished, and not as a something whereby he might benefit his fellow creatures. We will not pause now to state the circumstances under which he had become possessed of the title that he desecrated and the riches that he prostituted. Suffice it to say that there were some strange tales told concerning him at the time he became Lord Everton: but having once succeeded in grasping rank and fortune, he, with characteristic shamelessness, defied the world and laughed at what it said of him. We may however observe here that he was a widower and childless, and that there was no heir to his title or estates. For this he cared nothing; he had no ambition to perpetuate his name, being utterly indifferent as to what might happen in the world when once death should have called him away from it. He lived, thought, and acted solely for himself: he was selfishness personified!

Such was the detestable character who now entered the drawing-room of Henrietta's apartments, with a smirking self-sufficient look, a jaunty air, and a debonair gait. Henrietta had frequently seen him at the Opéra, where she had been persecuted by his overtures; and then she had thought him exceedingly ugly: but now she regarded him as a hideous monster—something to be loathed as well as execrated—something to be shrunk from as well as viewed with mingled indignation and terror. For the farther insight which she had obtained

into the iniquity of his character since the first moment she set foot in Beech-Tree Lodge, had even the effect of enhancing his physical ugliness in her estimation.

"My dear Henrietta," he began, with a tone and manner half of cajolery and half of assurance, "I am given to understand that you are not very well disposed towards me—"

"My lord," interrupted the damsel, "you have snatched me away from a mother whose invalid state demands all my care, and from a little brother who will be desolated without me. How can I possibly think of such an outrage without execrating the author of it—and perhaps in time burning to avenge it?"

"The word *revenge*, my dear girl," replied Everton, totally unabashed by the maiden's answer, "should not be breathed by lips that were formed only to talk of love. However, if such be your mood, I must leave you in it for the present. At the same time I may as well give you something to reflect upon, and relative to which I should like an early decision. Be mine, Henrietta, and your mother and brother shall be nobly provided for; while to yourself I will guarantee an annuity of five hundred a year for the remainder of your life."

"Have then my decision at once, Lord Everton!" exclaimed the girl proudly and indignantly. "My mother would sooner starve—I would sooner starve—and we would both sooner see a son and a brother starve, than obtain wealth on such terms. I know that I am powerless here, and that I am a prisoner: I know even that you yourself are wicked enough to attempt any outrage, and that you are surrounded by those who will only too faithfully give you their succour. But depend upon it, my lord, the day of retribution will come. It may be that long impunity has made you bold and daring, and that the unfulfilled threats of former victims prompt you to laugh at mine. But yet it were a blasphemy against heaven to believe that good fortune will always attend upon crime, and a libel upon my sex to suppose that there never shall be one with spirit enough to avenge her wrongs. Now, my lord, I have nothing more to say."

Having thus spoken, with mingled excitement and firmness, Henrietta quitted the room and passed into the bed-chamber, the door of which she

locked. For two hours did she remain there without coming forth, not knowing whether her persecutor had quitted the adjoining apartment or not. At length some one knocked at the door; and on inquiring who it was, Henrietta recognized Susan's voice in reply.

"Your dinner is served up, Miss," said the servant-woman.

The young captive was about to ask whether Lord Everton was still there; but instantaneously reflecting that if it suited Susan's purpose to answer her falsely, she would do so, she said nothing but issued forth from the bed-chamber. Lord Everton was no longer in the drawing-room, and as Henrietta entered the dining-room, she became assured that she was free from his persecutions—at least for the present. But how long would this tranquillity last? She had given him her decision in reply to his proposals; and it was not likely he would ask her to reconsider them. No: there was every reason, on the contrary to apprehend that his conduct would next be in accordance with his unscrupulous character, and that he would either use some diabolic artifice or else force to accomplish his designs.

Such were Henrietta's reflections; and fearful lest some soporific might be introduced into the food served up on the dinner-table, she made her repast off dry bread and pure water. The board was spread with all imaginable dainties, sufficient in quantity for a party of a dozen, and of quality to tempt the appetite of the most indifferent; but none of all those did the damsel touch. Susan said a few words to induce her to partake of the delicacies: but Henrietta gave no reply—and her meal being speedily ended, she retired into the next room.

For the remainder of the day she saw nothing more of either Lord Everton or Mrs. Martin; and so far from being encouraged by this circumstance, she regarded it as a sure omen that her worst anticipations would be confirmed. It was evident—at least to her comprehension—that no more persuasion or cajolery of words would be had recourse to—no more tempting offers made—but that stratagem or violence would be the means next employed.

Her tea was served up in the evening; then at nine o'clock a tray of refreshments the same as on the preceding night, was brought in; and

Susan, having inquired whether Miss Leyden wished for anything more, took her departure on receiving a reply in the negative. Henrietta, with a sad tightening at the heart, now began to make preparations for her defence ere she sought her bed-chamber. She bolted the outer door—she placed a chair slantwise against it—and then she pushed the table, which was heavy, up against the chair as an additional precaution. With the candle in her hand, she looked carefully about to assure herself that no one was concealed in the room: and she secured all the doors as she had done on the previous night. Now therefore, behold her once again locked up in the bed-chamber, where she likewise instituted the most rigorous search. But no one was secreted anywhere; and she felt assured that there was no means of reaching her chamber except by previously passing through the two other rooms. Those were so well secured that an entry could only be effected by violence; and if this took place, the noise would be certain to arouse her.

The clock of Hornsey church was striking ten as the poor girl sat down in her bed-chamber to reflect upon her position. The tears tickled like diamonds down her cheeks as she thought of what must be her mother's anguish and little Charley's grief at her absence and her silence. Vainly did she endeavour to tranquillize herself—she could not; her mental agony became almost maddening—she felt as if frenzy were fastening upon her brain. But at length the tears flowed more quickly—they gushed forth in a torrent—the pent-up sobs which surcharged her bosom, found an issue—and when the outpouring of her anguish was over, she felt considerably relieved.

Now she thought of retiring to rest; but gradually into her mind stole the recollection of the incident which had so terrified her during the past night—and a superstitious awe which she could not shake off, came over her. To tell the truth, she was afraid to seek her couch. Still more than half believing that what had so much alarmed her was nothing more than a dream, yet she did not altogether believe it was so: and her mind, attenuated by grief, was all the more susceptible of the influence of terror. Persons of the strongest nature have known a position like this, in which

on the one hand their good sense tells them that their fears might be accounted for by natural means, while on the other hand those fears themselves will not be thus reasoned away. Such was Henrietta's condition—and she dared not commence disappearsing herself.

There was a large easy chair in the room; and she thought that at all events she would not immediately go to bed, but would recline herself in this. She placed it in such a manner with its back towards the window that she could command, as she sat in it, a view of the door, the bed, and the cupboards. Poor girl! with her substantial terrors lest her persecutor should obtain admittance into her chamber, were blended her superstitious fears lest that shape with its pale, sorrowful face should again appear before her!

She reclined in the large arm-chair,—the candle, which stood upon the chest of drawers, showing forth every object in the room. We need not any farther attempt to analyze the reflections which engaged her mind: suffice it to say that she sat thinking—dismally, drearily thinking—until the clock of the village-church struck eleven, and soon afterwards she fell into a doze. She slept for about an hour, when she slowly wakened up as the clock was proclaiming the hour of midnight. But it was not an immediate and sudden awaking as on the previous night: it was the gradual arousing from the lethargy of slumber, with heaviness upon the eyes and a cloudy confusion of the brain.

For a moment she scarcely recollects where she was; but as consciousness became more distinct, she opened her eyes wider. The candle was still alight, but burning dimly—for the flame seemed to be struggling around an immense length of wick. It was a sort of mystic gloom rather than a clear light which filled the chamber; for the night without was starless and clouded. Gradually a cold tremor came upon Henrietta as she thought she beheld something standing in the deep shade of the curtains at the foot of the bed. Wildly she strained her eyes at the same instant that *something* moved: it came forward—and now, to her indescribable horror, she recognized that same shape she had seen on the previous night!

Again did she endeavour to cry out—and again was the power of utterance choked. Every limb grew rigid

—the blood appeared to freeze in her veins—every function of life stood still. And yet her mind had a horrible clearness; and her eyes too faithfully fulfilled the power of vision. She beheld that shape approach:—it was a tall gaunt figure, thin and lank, wrapped around with a dark garment resembling a dressing-gown, and confined at the waist by a string or cord. But the countenance—Oh! the countenance which gazed upon her—surely it did indeed belong unto the dead! No tint of vital colouring had it—but colourless and corpse-like was it. The eyes were fixed upon her with a glassy stare; and the expression of the face was that of solemn sadness—a deep and mournful gravity—yet fixed and rigid as the look of the dead ever is.

This shape advanced to within a few feet of where Henrietta, half-leaning forward in awful horror, sat gazing upon it. Slowly it raised its hand—its lips appeared to move—and then so overpowering was the consternation which lay like a weight of lead upon the unhappy girl, that she fell back insensible.

When she awoke again the candle was still burning; and no one was there. The shape, whatever it were, had disappeared: Henrietta was alone. For some minutes she sat utterly unable to move, and pondering awfully and solemnly upon what had taken place. Then, obedient to an impulse which suddenly prompted her, she fell upon her knees and breathed a prayer invoking heaven's protection.

Strengthened by her devotions, she rose; and trimming the candle, made it give forth a clear light. She no longer felt any excitement in her mind, but a deep and solemn awe sitting upon her soul: nor was she even frightened now. She knew that she had done no harm—her conscience was pure—and if the grave really gave up its dead, surely it could not be to do her an injury? Taking up the candle, she carefully examined the room: but everything was precisely in the same order as ere she had fallen asleep. She sat down again, and reflected in a deliberate manner—without nervousness, without excitement. That this recurrence of the mysterious visitation was no dream, she felt convinced: she knew that what she had seen was with her eyes wide open in full wakefulness, and not with her mental vision and in the depth of slum-

ber. The only question that remained therefore was to decide whether it was an apparition from another world, or a mortal denizen of this? Henrietta dared not think the former—yet scarcely knew how to believe the latter. For, admitting the last named hypothesis, how could the individual possibly have obtained ingress to her chamber? wherefore had he affected the solemn gravity of a ghost? why had he come to frighten her instead of speaking to her? Could it be a trick on the part of Lord Everton and his myrmidons in order to enfeeble her mind, shatter her energies, and reduce her to a state in which she might the more easily become the vile nobleman's victim? No: not for a single instant could it be held probable that this was the solution of the mystery; for completely in Lord Everton's power as she was, such trickery was altogether unnecessary. In short, she knew not what to think or which conjecture to adopt as the most rational.

As she sat in the arm-chair giving way to her reflections, sleep gradually stole upon her; and at length she fell into a profound slumber.

When she opened her eyes again it was broad daylight, and the sun was shining. She began to revolve in her mind the transaction of the past night; and though she still remained convinced that it was not a dream, she was still as far off as ever from discovering any solution for the mystery. She was ill though not having taken her proper night's rest—her spirits were deeply despondent—and she felt that two or three more days and nights passed in the same manner would throw her altogether upon a sick bed. Somewhat refreshed however by her ablutions, Henrietta issued forth from her chamber, and found the drawing and dining-rooms just as she had left them over-night. She removed the chair and table from the outer door; and soon afterwards Susan made her appearance with the breakfast things. The tea was most welcome to Henrietta: but she had no appetite for substantial food. Having partaken of the beverage she opened one of the windows and wooed the breeze to her throbbing brows and heated cheeks. Then she longed to descend into the garden and walked amidst the parterres of flowers, or in the shrubbery at the end. She was about to express her wish to the servant—for she really felt as if the monotony of those rooms

would drive her mad—but she checked herself with the reflection that by doing so she would be giving some evidence of a gradual reconciliation to her captive state. But then she thought again, that if she could obtain a view of the back part of the premises it might possibly suggest a means of escape. She accordingly said, "I feel so unwell through having passed two bad nights, that exercise and fresh air become absolutely necessary; and the person whom you call Mrs. Martin told me I might walk in the garden if I chose."

"Yes, with Mrs. Martin herself to accompany you," returned Susan.

"Be it so then," answered Miss Leyden after a moment's hesitation: for she decided that it would be better to view the premises even though it were requisite for the purpose to endure the presence of the most odious and detestable woman she had ever meet in her life.

"Then follow me," said the servant and Henrietta, hastily putting on her bonnet, proceeded down stairs in company with Susan.

The latter summoned Mr. Martin from one of the rooms opening out of the hall; and this woman conducted Henrietta along a passage terminating in a green-house filled with beautiful plants, and whence a flight of steps led down to the garden.

"You appear pale and ill, Miss Leyden," said Mrs. Martin, fixing her sinister-looking eyes earnestly upon her.

"I have no reason to seem cheerful or well," was the response. "Indeed I have passed to very bad nights—"

"But you were not disturbed by any noise?" demanded the woman quickly. "You heard nothing strange—unusual—"

Henrietta, struck by the peculiarity of Mrs. Martin's tone, turned her eyes upon her, and noticed the earnestness of her gaze. It instantaneously occurred to her that there was something in this: and she accordingly said, "I certainly was disturbed in the night—each night," she added emphatically.

"Indeed—you were disturbed? But how?" exclaimed the woman in a kind of alarm.

"If there be anything in the house that could disturb me, you are doubtless aware of its existance," answered Henrietta, determined to see what course the conversation would take if left to her companion to direct it.

Mrs. Martin looked in a strangely suspicious manner at Henrietta, but made no immediate remark. They walked on in silence until they reached the extremity of the garden; and then, as they turned to retrace their steps, Mrs. Martin said, "It is quite probable that you may have heard some unpleasant noise in the house—and yet it is strange that I did not over hear it."

These last words she uttered rather in a musing tone to herself, yet audible enough for Henrietta to hear. The young damsel said nothing: she was determined not to give explanations, but to elicit them if possible—because it naturally struck her that if her ghost-like visitant were really a human being and an inmate of the house, the same means which afforded him admittance to her room might furnish her with an avenue of escape. She now, while retracing her way by Mrs. Martin's side along the gravel-path, carefully scrutinized the rear of the building. The garden had high walls on either side, and was bounded by the shrubbery at the bottom. The New River flowed past the outer edge of the shrubbery, and thus hemmed the enclosure in at that extremity. The walls stretched down to the river's brink; and the ends of the masonry were garnished with long rows of iron spikes, so as to prevent any one from passing round them. The back of the mansion showed merely a number of windows, all furnished with iron bars; and the result of Henrietta's survey was the sad conviction that even if she could escape from her room into the garden, she would be as much a prisoner as ever.

"You have not explained to me," resumed Mrs. Martin after a long pause, "the nature of the sounds which alarmed you during the night?"

"You admit then the existence of the probability of such alarm?" said Henrietta; "or in other words, you are aware that there may have been strange noises heard?"

"Since you say so, I am bound to believe you," rejoined the woman, who evidently was as much disinclined to be communicative on the point as Henrietta herself. She waited for a reply—but as the maiden gave none, she went on to say, "If you hear anything more to-night you can tell me to-morrow. But let us now change the conversation. Are you not becoming weary of this obstinacy on your part?

Depend upon it you will soon grow tired of it—if you are not already—"

"Instead of changing the conversation," interrupted Henrietta, "let us drop it altogether. I have now walked enough, and will return into the house."

"Just as you please," responded Mrs. Martin coldly: and she led the way back into the dwelling through the green-house.

When once more alone in her own suite of apartments, Henrietta sat down and reflected on the few words which had been exchanged between herself and Mr. Martin. That in connexion with Beech-Tree Lodge there was some mystery into which Henrietta had as yet received small if any insight, she felt convinced: for when she had spoken of being disturbed in the night, Mrs. Martin had suggested *noises* as the had evidently been uneasy that cause and should have been heard. What noises could they be? for Henrietta had really heard none: and whence Mrs. Martin's uneasiness? The young girl could not help associating what she had *seen* with what Mrs. Martin supposed her to have *heard*; and therein perhaps lay the mystery. But was the house really haunted after all? No: Henrietta felt convinced that there was some mystery connected with natural and not with preternatural things. In short, was the being whom she had seen a prisoner within those walls? and was it some noise made by himself that Mrs. Martin fancied she might have heard? But still recurred the one paramount and bewildering question—namely, how on earth he had obtained admittance to her chamber?

Throughout that day she saw nothing of Lord Everton. Susan brought her up her meals according to the regular routine: the evening came—the usual question was asked between nine and ten o'clock, whether she had any farther orders to give—and on the negative being returned, the servant-woman bade her good night. Then commenced the same process of securing and barricading the outer door as hitherto—the locking of the other doors—and the careful examination of the bed-chamber ere Henrietta thought of taking repose.

All this being done, she deliberated with herself what course to pursue. Should she sit up, keep awake, and which to see if the mysterious shape (whether apparition or living being)

would revisit her? Yes: this was her decision, notwithstanding she felt exhausted and in need of repose. She would not entrust herself to the luxurious softness of the easy chair, lest sleep should overtake her unawares: but she sat down in a common chair, on the alert to cast her eyes to any part of the room whence the slightest sound might emanate. Presently however she felt a drowsiness stealing over her; and then in order to shake it off she rose up from her seat and paced to and fro. She snuffed the candle, so that there should be no dimness wherein she might be taken by surprise; and as time wore on she grew more nervous, more anxious.

The village church proclaimed twelve; and Henrietta stood still to count the strokes, so that she might be assured of the right hour. The metallic sound of the iron tongue of Time rolled oscillating through the still air of the night;—but mingling with the last vibrations of that sound, there seemed to be the mournful lament of a human voice. Henrietta listened with a sudden feeling of awe: and she could distinctly hear a prolonged lamentation—not loud, but still plain and unmistakable. All in an instant this was broken by a wild thrilling cry—good heavens, what a cry! that seemed to rend the whole edifice in twain. It ceased—all was still—but the poor girl sank trembling with affright into the easy chair, which was nearest to her at the moment.

Her heart beat with such loud palpitations that she could hear them as if a clenched hand were thumping against the cushioned side of the chair in which she was now reclining. Every fibre and nerve in her frame seemed galvanized with the sensation of terror. But gradually this feeling subsided; and she thought to herself that instead of experiencing alarm on her own account, she ought to feel sympathy on that of the unhappy wretch whose lament and shriek she had heard. All continued still and tranquil: the silence which had followed that appalling cry had something dread and stupendous in it. Henrietta sat in the easy chair, wondering what it could all mean, and associating in her mind those lamentations and that cry with the noises to which Mrs. Martin had alluded, and the whole with the visitations she had received in her chamber.

There is a terror the excess of which

produces a re-action that merges into a lulling effect,—the natural stupor which inevitably follows the extreme tension of all the nerves. Thus was it with Henrietta Leyden, and insensibly did a sort of dreamy repose steal upon her as she reclined in that armchair to which she had in the first instance been so fearful of entrusting herself.

Her sleep was not however sound. It was that kind of dozing in which consciousness is not altogether lost, but confused and hazy,—a sort of semi-sleep from which the slightest sound will startle one. And thus was Henrietta all in a moment aroused into complete wakefulness; and springing up from the chair, she beheld some one in her room. But it was not the mysterious figure of the two former nights: it was Lord Everton.

"Wretch!" cried Henrietta in wild-est alarm; and her eyes swept round the room to see if any open door showed the means by which he had obtained admittance: but the survey was vain—and it seemed to her as if he had sprung up from the very floor beneath her feet.

"Charming Henrietta," said the nobleman, "this passion will not serve you. Foolish girl that you are to refuse all the brilliant advantages which I offer you, but which nevertheless shall be yours in spite of yourself—"

"Coupled with infamy!" murmured Henrietta in a hoarse but resolute voice. "No, my lord—never, never!"

"Let us sit down and converse tranquilly," said the nobleman. "You perceive that you are in my power—"

"Lord Everton, I command you to quit this room!" interrupted Henrietta, flinging round her eyes in search of some weapon of defence. "You may use force, my lord—but the struggle will be a desperate one."

"In which you must succumb!" exclaimed the old nobleman: and mad-dened by his passion, he suddenly sprang forward and caught the young captive in his arms.

At the instant a third person appeared upon the scene—gliding in swift as a fleeting shadow—so suddenly, so quickly, that Henrietta, especially in the trouble and excitement of her mind, saw not whence he came and observed not how. But he did in an instant recognize this shape: it was

the one she had twice seen before—the one enveloped in the flowing gown and with the pales and face; but the features now wore a fierce and terrible expression.

"Monster!" was the single word which fell upon Henrietta's ear, and which was addressed to Lord Everton, who had instantaneously relinquished his hold on her: and the utterance of that word was accompanied by a terrific blow dealt by the new comer, and which laid the old nobleman prostrate and senseless on the floor.

"This way, this way!" said the stranger, quickly grasping Henrietta's wrist, and thus proving that he was indeed a being of flesh and blood.

Then quick as thought he led her round the foot of the bed to an opening in the wall, through which they both darted; and now Henrietta found herself in a corridor communicating with a staircase which she saw at a glance was not the principal one of the mansion, nor one which she had seen before. A lamp burnt in that corridor, and another on the staircase, down which Henrietta was hurried by her companion. With such mad precipitation did he proceed, that it was a wonder he was not hurled to the bottom, dragging her along with him; and full evident was it that he knew it to be a desperate attempt at escape which they were thus making.

A vain one too! For all in a moment the rushing noise of several footsteps was heard. "Seize them! seize them!" were the words which reached the ears of the fugitives; and in another moment they were encountered by Mark Bellamy, the footman, Mrs Martin, Susan, and the gardener, who all emerged from another corridor joining that same staircase on the lower storey.

With a desperate blow from his clenched fist, Mark Bellamy struck down Henrietta's companion; and he fell heavily without uttering a word, either stunned or killed. A piercing shriek burst from the damsel's lips; and overcome with terror and despair, she fainted in the arms of the females.

When she returned to consciousness, she found herself undressed and lying in the bed of that chamber which she knew too well, and whence for a moment there had seemed the hope if not the certainty of escape. In a word, she was still a captive at Beech-Tree Lodge.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MASQUERADE.

THE Duke and Duchess of Harcourt gave a grand masquerade-ball at their splendid mansion overlooking the Green Park. This palatial edifice had only been recently built: it occupied an enormous space of ground—immense sums had been laid out alike on its architectural arrangements and its internal embellishments—and in all respects it was said to rival the Sovereign's palace in the immediate vicinity.

The Duke and Duchess of Harcourt were giving a splendid series of entertainments to celebrate their installation in their new residence; and this masquerade-ball formed one of the festivals. His Grace was about sixty-four years of age, and boasted his descent from one of the oldest families in the kingdom. Retrospecting over a long line of ancestors—or contemplating their portraits in the picture-gallery of his new palace—he might safely reckon amongst them as large a number of miscreant's marauders, and ruffians, together with as pretty a sprinkling of demireps, as ever entered into the catalogue of any aristocratic genealogy. But with this point we have at present nothing to do: suffice it to say that his Grace the Duke of Harcourt was supremely proud of his bloodstained ancestors and courtesan ancestresses; and therefore we may safely leave him—certainly unenvied—to such pleasant satisfaction. He was an ultra-Tory—not from honest conviction, because he was too shallow-minded to be able to understand great political questions or national interests: but he was a Tory, for the simple reason that his father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, and so on, were all Tories before him—and therefore he inherited their prejudices along with the hereditary title and estates. In person, he was a short, thin, lantern-visaged mean-looking little man: and when standing next to his valet or his butler, if a stranger had been asked "Which is the Duke?" he would have been sure to point out either the valet or the butler in preference to the Duke himself.

The Duchess was twenty years younger than her husband—tall, stately, and in the glorious *éminpoint* of forty-four. She had a proud and haughty look; but was withal vain, conceited, frivolous, and narrow-minded. Half-a-dozen children whose ages

varied from sixteen to twenty four, were the issue of her union with the Duke of Harcourt: but we will not now intrude upon the reader the long-winded and high-sounding names of the three sons and three daughters forming the olive branches of this ducal family. Suffice it say that my Lord Marquis the eldest son, who was heir to the title and estates, already an M. P., and with the peerage in prospective, was little better than a drivelling idiot: while his two brothers, having finished their education at those pandemonia called Universities, were looking out for government places; and his three sisters were vain and frivolous girls, reflecting the character and example of their mother, and looking out for husbands as their brothers were for places.

It was at Harcourt House, then, that this splendid masquerade-ball was given. The aristocracy and "elite of fashion" (as Court sycophants and servile scribes phrase it) had been talking and thinking of the forthcoming ball for a month past, and had been making ample preparations for their appearance at it. When the wished-for evening arrived, all the approaches to the mansion were thronged with carriages; and the police showed themselves mighty busy with their staves in clearing the way for those brilliant equipages amongst the "mob" and "rabble" (as the aristocracy term the working classes). The thousand invitations had been issued. Not that the Duke and Duchesses of Harcourt had any friendly feeling towards a quarter so many persons: but they gathered together such a vast quantity of guests in order to show the world what an immense multitude their new palace could accommodate.

The entrance-hall was thronged with servants in gorgeous-liveries—be immense staircases were hung with banners that festooned above the as and around the numerous landings were embellished similar manner—and the spacious were a perfect blaze of light, brilliancy, and magnificence. The almost countless as they seemed multiplied over again in the mirrors which adorned the and so numerous were the its thrown open for their that they constituted a passage for those who were not

familiar with them. The largest of all was the concert-room, which was surrounded with boxes resembling those of a theatre, and in which the elderly or more quiet portion of the guests might seat themselves and enjoy the splendid *coup d'œil* presented by the busy, bustling, joyous crowd on the floor below.

Nearly all the company wore masques, or fancy dresses of some kind; and the grotesque, the ludicrous, and the fantastic blended strangely with the splendour, gorgeousness, and elegance of the whole. We will not pause to individualize the costumes: suffice it to say that unusual efforts had been made by many of the guests to introduce novelties of all descriptions—some pleasing, others startling—but all characterized by a display of wealth.

The carriages had begun to arrive shortly before ten o'clock; and by eleven all who intended to be present were there. So immense was the new place, and so numerous were the saloons thrown open for their entertainment, that there was no inconvenient crowding—except perhaps here and there, where some masque by the novelty of his apparel or the fluent wit of his conversation succeeded in engrossing the attention of a large group around him.

Amongst the earliest of the arrivals were two gentlemen the taller of whom was attired in the elegant costume of a Spanish Cavalier, and the other in a suit of admirably devised pasteboard armour. The former wore a black mask over his countenance; and the latter had the vizor of his helmet closed. We will not make any mystery as to who these personages were; but at once confess to the reader that the former was Lord Harold Staunton, and the latter Lord Saxondale. Having lounged through the rooms, they presently retired together into an alcove, which was formed in a hot-house at the extremity of one of the saloons, by an artistically contrived array of oriental plant, the enormous leaves and branches of which constituted a perfect wall of verdure, which was continued upward and then in a roof-like shape by means of garlands and festoons of vines, honey suckles, jessamines and other creepers intermixed with roses. In this alcove there happened to be nobody at the moment Lord Harold and his friend entered

and as there was a table spread with cooling drinks, they threw themselves lazily upon the sofas to partake of some refreshment and chat for some minutes.

"Is Florina to be here to-night, do you know, Harold?" asked Lord Saxondale.

"Nay—I should rather ask you that question," was Staunton's reply. "Nevertheless, I can answer it. Florina is rather unwell: and I think, Edmund, that is not altogether right of you to keep away from Cavendish Square for whole days together, as you have done."

"My dear friend," rejoined the dissipated young nobleman, "I must confess that I have not behaved well—especially as you know I am very fond of Flo. But when one gets hold of a new mistress—"

"Understand me, Edmund," interrupted Lord Harold, "I do not at all object to your amour with Emily Archer: but I must remind you that being engaged to my sister, you at least ought to show her proper attention. However, if you pay your respects in Cavendish Square to-morrow, you can make some apology for your neglect. Take care how you keep the vizor of your helmet up too long while drinking your lemonade; for some one might enter this alcove abruptly, and recognize you—in which case you would lose all the amusement of the *incognito* for the rest of the evening."

"Trust me," exclaimed Edmund, "I do not mean to spoil my fun, I can assure you."

"Tell me, my dear fellow," said Staunton, "what on earth put it into your head to wear such a dress as that? It must keep you as stiff as if encased in buckram. And as for dancing, of course you will not think of such a thing with your pasteboard armour."

"I will tell you, Harold, why I had this suit made for me," responded Saxondale. "You know that I am descended from an ancestor who founded my family in the time of the Tudors; and so I thought I could not do better than represent my ancestor here to-night."

"Are your mother and sisters coming?" inquired Harold.

"To tell you the truth I know very little about it, but I believe that Juliana and Constance had fancy-dresses made. And as for lady-mother, I have not heard her say anything on the subject. For myself, I had my

pasteboard panoply sent, as you know, to your lodgings—"

"Yes—and a precious deal of trouble Alfred and I had to put your armour on for you," observed Lord Harold. "If the knights of the olden time had so much difficulty in getting on their mail, they must have spent half their lives in dressing and the other half in undressing again."

"And now I bethink me," exclaimed Saxondale, as a sudden recollection struck him, "we were so occupied in fitting on this precious armour of mine when I was with you in Jermyn Street this evening, that you had not leisure to finish the anecdote you had commenced."

"It can be told in a few words," rejoined Lord Harold. "But here—read this note, if you can manage to do so through the bars of your helmet. You may perceive it was dated the day before yesterday."

Thus speaking, Staunton drew forth a *billet*, which he handed to Lord Saxondale, who received it with his pasteboard gauntlet; and having clumsily managed to open it, read the following lines:—

"TO THE LORD HAROLD STAUNTON,

"A lady who loves you, but of whose passion you are not aware, desires an opportunity of conversing with you for a few minutes and without restraint. This opportunity will be afforded by the masquerade-ball given by their Graces the Duke and Duchess of Harcourt next Wednesday evening, and to which you are no doubt invited. It will be desirable, for the purposes of mutual recognition, that the costumes we are respectively to wear, should be previously known to each other. Permit me therefore, by virtue of my sex, to dictate to you the apparel in which you must appear, and which will best become that handsome person which has made so deep an impression on my heart. Lord Harold, for that occasion you must play the part of a *Spanish Cavalier*: and inasmuch as it is possible that there may be other gentlemen who will choose the same elegant and picturesque style of costume, I beseech you to wear in front of your cap the diamond-clasp which I enclose. You may know me by the costume of *Queen Isabella of Spain*—not the child-Queen of the present day, but the wife of the great Ferdinand and the patroness of Christopher Columbus. As the Queen of Spain therefore, it will only be

fitting and proper that I should receive your homage; and I shall accordingly expect to be accosted by my gallant Spanish cavalier on Wednesday night at Hercourt House. In order to give additional weight to this mandate, I sign myself for the present,

"ISABELLA OF SPAIN."

The writing was in a female hand, but evidently disguised; and as Lord Saxon-dale returned the note to Harold Staunton, he glanced through the bars of his helmet at the clasp alluded to therein. It was a beautiful and costly ornament, and was therefore an unmistakable token that the fair writer of the letter, whoever she might be, intended no jest, but was in downright earnest.

"You are a fortunate fellow, Harold," observed Edmund: "and this love-affair promises to be of a very interesting nature. Of course, you have not the slightest idea who the lady is?"

"Not the slightest," responded Staunton. "I know nothing more than you yourself have gathered from that letter. It was left at my lodgings the day before yesterday, by some messenger who immediately went away. Whether the lady is old or young, handsome or ugly, tall or short, I know no more than yourself: but I should hope and imagine that she possesses some share of beauty—otherwise she cannot expect that her gift of the diamond-clasp will be sufficient to chain me to her chariot wheels."

"Depend upon it she is handsome," observed Edmund: "for she must have great faith in her own charms and be accustomed to conquest, thus to single you out as the object of her passion."

"That is just what I think," rejoined Staunton; "and unless she is a very great fool, she must be tall and elegant, and possess a queenly figure to have chosen the costume in which she is to make her appearance. But the room seems to be filling now: let us lounge forth from this alcove again. We shall have to separate presently, Edmund, when my unknown *inamorata* makes her appearance, and perhaps she may engross me for all the rest of the evening. Therefore we may as well make an appointment for to-morrow—that is to say, unless you intend to cut me altogether and devote yourself entirely to Emily Archer."

"How can you say such a thing, Harold?" exclaimed Saxon-dale. "You know very well that I consider you my

best friend. We will dine together to-morrow evening at Long's, and chat over all things interesting to ourselves. So *that* is an appointment, remember. By the bye, have you made any progress in your pursuit of the beautiful Angela Vivaldi?"

"Candidly speaking, my dear Edmund, I have not," answered Lord Harold Staunton. "I cannot even find out where she lives; and you know perfectly well that the idea of obtaining access to her at the Opera is propostorous. But I have not abandoned the pursuit, and mean to devote myself pretty closely to it in a few days—"

"Unless," observed Edmund, "this new love-affair which presents itself in so mysterious a shape by means of that letter and the appointment for to-night, turns all your thoughts into quite another direction."

"Well, it may do so," remarked Lord Harold, carelessly. "But even if my unknown *inamorata* be beautiful beyond expectation I do not think her charms can possibly come up to those of Angela Vivaldi."

The two young noblemen finished their lemonade, and readjusted the one his mask and the other his vizor over their countenances. They then lounged forth from the bowery alcove and made their way amongst the multitude of guests that had been pouring into the saloons during the half-hour spent in the preceding colloquy. As we have already said, there were costumes of every variety and all descriptions. Amongst those worn by gentlemen, were several Spanish Cavalier dresses; but with none were the plumes of the cap fastened by means of so brilliant a diamond clasp as that which shone above Lord Harold Staunton's masked countenance. There were also amongst the female costumes several representing the apparel of Spanish queens and princesses of the olden time: but none which identified itself with that of the wife of the illustrious Ferdinand. Half-an-hour passed, and the two friends were still lounging about together, when all of a sudden Lord Harold nudged his companion's elbow, and said in a hasty whisper, "Now, Saxon-dale, we must separate."

Edmund cast a look in the direction towards which Lord Harold was himself at the time gazing; and he beheld a tall, stately, and majestic female figure, clad in a queenly apparel which

set off her fine shape to the fullest and noblest advantage. She wore a black mask upon her countenance; and the silken fringe descended so low as entirely to cover her chin, the wizard thus concealing the entire face, save and except the bright eyes which sent their glances flashing through the holes.

"I wish you success," whispered Saxondale; and turning away from his friend, he walked off to another part of the room.

Lord Harold Staunton advanced towards the lady who had just entered, and whose appearance seemed to correspond with that of her whom he was expecting: but he dared not immediately accost her, although he felt convinced that the costume which she wore was intended to represent that of Isabella of Spain. Not long was he suffered to remain in suspense; for the lady herself, no doubt singling him out from all other Spanish Cavaliers then present by the diamond-clasp upon his cap made a slight beckoning signal which his eye immediately caught. The next instant he was by her side; and she at once placed her arm in his.

He led her gently amidst the brilliant assemblage, in the direction of the alcove where he and Saxondale had so recently been; and not a word was spoken by either of them as they advanced towards that spot. Lord Harold felt himself a prey to mingle rapture and confusion. Though the lady's countenance was so effectually concealed that he could not obtain the slightest glimpse of it,—and thus if she had been his own sister he could not have recognised her,—yet he felt assured that behind that mask was a countenance well worthy to be gazed upon. His eyes swept over the superb outlines of her noble and majestic shape; and he thought to himself that a form blending so much voluptuous symmetry with dignified elegance and feminine grace, could not possibly be associated with an ordinary, much less an ugly countenance. And then, too, there was something in the whole bearing, the gait, the gestures, and the walk of his companion which seemed to indicate a lady of the highest rank; so that while he was excited with a pleasurable suspense as what to the style of her beauty might be, he felt embarrassed and confused as to the way in which he should address her. Indeed, for one with whom timidity

was not very prevalent, this awkwardness on his part was singular, and could only have arisen from the presentiment that it was no ordinary or commonplace love-adventure in which he was engaged. But who the lady might be, he could not form the remotest conjecture. Not only did the mask so effectually conceal her countenance, but the drapery which she wore upon her head and which descended upon her shoulders, altogether veiled her hair, and even the shape of that head, the carriage of which upon the arching neck and fine shoulders was nevertheless statuesque and queenly. Above the drapery she wore a crown, the diamonds of which reflected with jets of light the lustre of the many lamps suspended to the ceilings and ranged round the walls; and her flowing garments were embellished with precious stones. There seemed to be a real royalty about her, as there was likewise a mystery which enhanced the romantic charm of the love affair wherein Lord Harold Staunton thus found himself engaged.

It must not be supposed that this meeting between the young nobleman and the unknown lady had anything marked or extraordinary in it so as to attract the notice of the other guests; for there were plenty of encounters of the same kind, and according to preconcerted arrangements; besides, no one could tell whether a lady, when thus meeting a gentleman, was not being joined by a brother, an intimate friend, a near relative, or an acknowledged suitor. Certain it was, however, that on her first entrance the lady did attract much attention, but solely on account of the tasteful elegance of her dress and her own imposing and grandly symmetrical figure. We have already said that a pair of dark eyes sent their fires flashing through the holes in the mask; and as Lord Harold caught those glances, he beheld therein an additional reason for supposing that the countenance to which such eyes belonged must be eminently handsome.

They passed amidst the brilliant assemblage, not with the haste of persons wishing to break the spell of silence as speedily as possible, nor as if they were purposely seeking the alcove for the sake of retirement from the rest: but they proceeded in the slow and gracefully lounging manner which is adopted in the ball-room—

and on reaching the alcove, they passed into it with the air of a couple seeking no studied seclusion, but merely availing themselves in a casual manner of an opportunity to retire for a while from the midst of the more heated atmosphere of the saloon.

"And now, fair lady—or rather, I should say your Majesty," observed Lord Harold Staunton, in a tone of courteous gaiety, as he conducted his companion to a seat in the alcove and placed himself by her side,—"may I be permitted to behold that countenance which is to shed the light of such joy upon my heart, and the beauty of which is to render me for ever the most devoted of your admirers?"

"Lord Harold Staunton," replied the lady, in a voice which was not merely low and subdued, but also disguised,—a tone which, we may here remark, she preserved throughout the entire discourse that followed,—"you will perhaps find that this adventure in which you have embarked, is of a more mysterious and romantic character than you could possibly have conceived it to be. As yet you stand but on the threshold of it. If you hesitate to proceed farther, you are at full liberty to retreat at once—and there will be no harm done: but if you decide upon following up the enterprise, you must prepare to obey my dictates in all things, and to render me good service ere you can hope for your reward."

"The adventure has already become so interesting," at once replied Staunton, "that I am prepared to fall upon my knees at the feet of Queen Isabella of Spain, and vow the homage of my heart and the service of my arm."

"Speak not too quickly, Sir Cavalier," replied the unknown lady; "for I ought to address you according to your assumed character, and not as Lord Harold Staunton. But again I say, speak not too quickly—promise not too hastily—lest you should repent of your rashness and precipitation."

"It must be something of an extraordinary character which your Gracious Majesty has to command your humble servant to undertake that you could be in any doubt as to whether I will accept the service!"—and as Lord Harold thus spoke, he took the lady's hand in his own.

"The pressure of this hand," she at first said, suiting the action to the word, "is for the present the only

earnest you can receive of that love which I bear you. For I warn you beforehand that I shall not even remove the mask from my countenance this evening—nor tell you who I am—nor allow you the slightest cue to the discovery of my name. That it is a proud and a noble one, I give you the solemn assurance—"

"And I am not to behold that countenance which I feel convinced is so handsome?" said Lord Harold, in accents of mingled cajolery and disappointment.

"No—not this evening. And yet I swear to you that it is handsome—handsomer perhaps than your imagination may depict—of a beauty indeed that may court comparison with the charms of any lady in this brilliant assemblage. And that I love you, my own cavalier,—if such I am indeed to call you, and if such you will prove,—I have already avowed and hesitate not to avow again. I am rich also," continued the lady: "and if it be any proof of my love to lavish my wealth upon you, that testimony shall likewise be given. Now, will you accept this love of mine? will you become the favourite cavalier on whose head Queen Isabella may shower her bounties? and will you in anticipation of the crowning recompence of all that woman can bestow, blindly and devotedly enlist yourself in my service?"

"Devotedly—yes," rejoined Lord Harold: "but *blindly*—I do not comprehend the sense in which you use the term, most Gracious Queen."

"I mean that you will undertake to fulfil the task I shall enjoin you, without questioning me as to my motives—without in any way seeking to discover them, until the time may come when I shall be permitted to reveal them. Now say, Sir Cavalier, have you sufficient faith in my love and my beauty, as well as in my gratitude to devote yourself thus blindly to my service?"

"Yes—Oh, yes!" answered Lord Harold, lost in mingled wonder and infatuation; and even as he pressed the lady's gloved hand between both his own, he felt a thrill of ecstatic pleasure quivering through his entire frame.

"I shall not express my gratitude now for this assurance which you give me," she went on to observe, "because it is but the meet and adequate return you are making for the love which I have already given you, I have long

loved you, my own handsome cavalier—I have often thought of revealing the secret of this love; but I have not dared to do so! And when I give you this assurance you will perhaps take it as a proof that it is no dissipated creature, no debauched demirep no trafficker in numerous amours, who is now addressing you,—but one who has never yet proved faithless to the duties of her sex—never yet stained the purity of her reputation!"

"But the service you demand of me—tell me quick, my adored Queen Isabella," urged Lord Harold, "that I may undertake it with the least possible delay, and thus bring myself nearer to the crowning happiness which is to be my reward."

"I have already told you, Sir Cavalier," replied the unknown lady, "that it is a service of the valorous arm which I demand of you."

"Oh! but all this must be a mere jest, beautiful Queen Isabella," exclaimed Lord Harold. "Yet if it suits your whim or caprice to carry on the conversation in the same style—"

"You see," interrupted the lady, "that in order to be consistent with circumstances, we must be in all respects what we suppose ourselves—I Queen Isabella of Spain, and you my own cavalier. Now then, such being our present belief, we are living in the age of chivalry when gallant warriors court deeds of danger in order to distinguish themselves that they may win the admiration of their lady-loves. Know, then, Sir Cavalier, that I have an enemy—a mortal enemy, of whom I wish to be rid. No matter how he became my enemy, nor what he has done, nor wherefore I wish to extirpate him from my path. It is sufficient for you to know that I have this enemy, and that the devoted champion who shall give him his doom, becomes the master of my heart."

The lady paused—but Lord Harold Staunton knew not what observation to make. He could not regard her words as serious and yet they were uttered full seriously. He therefore held his peace; and through the eyelet holes of his mask did he gaze upon the disguised unknown with a poignant desire to penetrate the mystery which enveloped her.

"Perhaps you imagine," she resumed, all the while speaking in a low and dissembling voice, "that this is a mere masquerading whimsicality? But it is not so. We will if you please drop

our fancied characters, and resume our real ones: that is to say, you shall be once more Lord Harold Staunton, and I will be an unknown lady of high rank and title who loves you, who demands a service at your hand, and who offers you everything that woman can give as the recompense of that service when it shall be accomplished. It is true, as I have been telling you, that I have an enemy—true that he must be removed from my path: but start not, Lord Harold Staunton—I ask you not to commit the foul crime of murder! No—there are other means of accomplishing the aim. First of all, however, I ask that you will believe me when I assure you I have been insulted by a certain individual; and secondly, that I am serious in demanding his punishment at your hands."

"If you indeed be serious most incomprehensible unknown," replied Staunton, "I will undertake to punish any man who has insulted you."

"This is what I require," continued the lady. "You must seek out this individual to whom I allude; and without appearing to have any special purpose in view, or to be prompted by a premeditated design, you must provoke him to a quarrel—level some insult at him—and then—For I understand that with the pistol no man in England can outvie Lord Harold Staunton—"

"But you are *not* serious—you cannot be serious!" ejaculated the young nobleman, who was not so thoroughly depraved as to listen without emotion to this murderous project. "If it were to inflict personal chastisement upon the individual to whom you are alluding, I should not hesitate—"

"And would not that inevitably lead to a duel?" asked the lady.

"True!" ejaculated Staunton: then in a slow and deliberate manner he said, "But to seek in cold blood a dispute with some one who has never injured me—"

"Our interview may end here," said the lady curtly as she rose from her seat. "I have been mistaken in Lord Harold Staunton; and I am sorry that I should have given him the trouble to listen to me thus far—still more sorry," she added in a murmuring voice, as if she were deeply moved, "that I should have bestowed upon him my love!"

"Stop one moment—do not let us part thus!" exclaimed Harold, whose

head was turning with the bewilderment of his ideas and the infatuation of his senses. "Forgive me if I hesitated: but all this is so singular—so romantic—indeed, it appears to belong to another age and another country—"

"And yet it belongs to this age, to this country, and to the present moment," rejoined the lady, suffering herself to sink down again upon the sofa in compliance with the movement which Harold imparted to the pressure of his hand as he grasped her own. "But in this age as well as in any other, and in this country too, the aspiring lover must often do something to win his beauteous mistress; and I have assured you though I myself say the words, that the lady in the present case *is* worth the winning. Now listen to me for a minute longer. You are gay, Lord Harold—and the love of a beautiful woman cannot be indifferent to you: you are comparatively poor—and the wealth which she can lavish must be an object to you. You are asked to risk your life for her, that you may clear her path of an enemy; and if you accomplish this, you need not accept her love as a favour or her wealth as a boon, but deemed them both as a right."

"I yield—I consent—I am your devoted Cavalier and you are once again my Queen Isabella, to whom all homage is due!" and as he thus spoke, Lord Harold Staunton pressed her gloved hand to his lips. "Now, name to me this individual—"

"No—not to night," at once replied the lady. "I must leave you a few hours to think well over the matter. Tomorrow, soon after nine o'clock, you shall receive the name of the individual in a letter. But I must exact from you, my own cavalier, the most solemn and a sacred promise that you will not breathe aught of all this to a single living soul. If by any accident you should suspect or discover who I am before the time comes when I may choose to reveal myself, you must still more religiously than ever keep the secret in your own breast. If you prove indiscreet I am certain to hear of it: if you breathe a single syllable in the ear of another, although you may exact an oath of inviolability from that other, yet shall I be certain to find out your imprudence—I will even call it your treachery. And in that case my love would turn to hatred; and instead of looking for a recompense, you would have to beware of my ven-

geance! But on the other hand, if you prove faithful to your promise—if you keep the secret as religiously as if it were one revealed from the dead—and if you serve me to the fullest extent, not deviating one single inch from the course I have laid down, there is nothing you can ask of me that I shall not be prepared to grant."

Having thus spoken, the lady rose; and Lord Harold likewise quitted his seat. He would have detained her still longer—he would have besought and conjured her to throw off at once the mystery wherewith she had surrounded herself—but she took his arm, and in a firm though still in a low and disguised voice, said, "Enough for the present! let us now lounge forth again amongst the company."

They accordingly issued from the bawdy alcove, and threading the whole range of state apartments, conversed upon in different topics. But there was to a certain degree a restraint and embarrassment on the part of both; and the lady, appearing to feel this, suddenly observed. "Lord Harold, let us separate for the present. Remember your promise: remember also that I love you!"

She then quitted him abruptly, and mingling amongst the thickest of the multitude, was speedily lost to his view. He remained standing where she had left him for two or three minutes, wrapt up in profound thought, from which he was aroused by being suddenly caught by the arm. It was Lord Saxondale in his pasteboard armour who had thus rejoined him.

"Well, my dear Harold, how got you on with your mysterious unknown?" he asked. "Is she mysterious still? is she still unknown? and was it all a mere masquerading trick? Or are you really and truly blessed with the love of some lady whose beauty outshines her virtue? By heaven, though I cannot see your face, yet I can tell that you are not altogether as you ought to be?"

"My dear Edmund, if I made a gesture of impatience you must not take it as unkind," responded Lord Harold Staunton: "for I was thinking at the moment of all that had passed between that lady and myself."

"Then it is really a settled love affair," observed Edmund. "But I suppose you mean to tell me all about it after showing me the letter: besides

which, you and I never have any secrets from each other—”

“Oh no, never!” ejaculated Staunton. “Only on the present occasion I have nothing to tell. Have you amused yourself?” he inquired, endeavouring to turn the conversation into another channel.

“Yes, uncommonly well. I have had such fun with some of the masques: they have endeavoured to find out who I am, but cannot for the life of them. My sisters are here—they are dressed as Maids of Honour in the time of Louis XIV: but my mother is not. I did not much think she would come—and the girls have just told me that she has shut herself up in her apartment at home in a fit of the sullessness, or something of the sort. But come, let us go into the refreshment room and seize an opportunity of getting some wine without standing the chance of revealing who we are.”

“Willingly,” answered Lord Harold, glad that he had thus escaped at least for the present from further questioning on the part of Lord Saxondale.

We need not dwell any longer upon the incidents, pleasures, or details of the masqued ball at Harcourt House. Suffice it to say that at two o'clock in the morning the supper rooms were thrown open; and then it was expected—as indeed it was necessary for the purpose of partaking of the banquet—that all the guests should remove their masks. This was done; and infinite was the amusement produced by the revelation of countenances that now took place. But Lord Harold Staunton did not wait for the announcement of supper; and retired at an hour so early as to astonish and almost disgust Lord Saxondale, who declared his intention to remain until the end: but his friend pleaded sudden and severe indisposition as an excuse for his premature departure. The truth was that Harold was most anxious to reach his own lodgings, and ponder well upon all that had occurred between himself and the unknown lady. He was more infatuated with that mysterious being than it seemed possible for one of his reckless and dissipated character to become and more than he himself could account for. When he retired to rest, sleep did not soon visit his eyes; and when it did come, he was pursued with the most fantastic dreams, Queen Isabella of Spain appearing conspicuous as the Heroine.

He rose before nine in the morning, and anxiously awaited the arrival of

the promised communication. Nor was he kept in suspense much beyond the promised hour. A letter was brought up by his valet Alfred at about half past nine o'clock, and the address of which was written in the same disguised female hand as the billet he had shown to Lord Saxondale. On opening the letter he perceived at the first glance a bank-note for one thousand pounds; and inside the envelope was written a name—nothing but a name!

“Ah!” ejaculated Lord Harold Staunton as that name met his eye—the name of the lady's enemy with whom he was to seek a dispute: and then, having given vent to that ejaculation, he fell into a profound reverie.

— — —

was not sufficiently an invalid to require the attendance of the family physician, but that in a few days she should be herself again. The greater portion of the week was passed by Florina in the solitude of her own apartments,—but not with her ivory-painting nor her music. All the implements connected with the former did she place out of sight, inasmuch as they reminded her of him from whom she had learnt the art; and as for her music, she was not in spirits to enable her to play enlivening airs, and was already too sad to practise melancholy ones. It was a long and anxious week for poor Florina: often and often did the tears flow down her cheeks—often and often too was her bosom convulsed with sobs!

But during that week, had Deveril made no attempt to communicate with her? The reader will recollect that when he called at her house on the same day as Lady Saxondale, the door had been shut in his face, and he was dismissed with the intimation that his services were no longer required, but that he was to send in his account. At first he thought that Lady Macdonald had discovered what had taken place between himself and Florina; and he was thus plunged into the deepest despondency. But on the following day he learnt from other sources how Lady Saxondale had been propagating the most odious calumnies concerning him; and he now at once understood the motive of the treatment which had received at Lady Macdonald's house in Cavendish Square. He thereupon addressed a letter to Lady Macdonald, stating that the tongue of slander had been busy at work to injure him, and beseeching an opportunity to explain and vindicate his conduct in respect to Lady Saxondale. But Lady Macdonald returned him his letter in a blank envelope. He wrote to her again; and the second letter was returned unanswered. He called at the house once more, but was sternly denied an interview with her ladyship. Subsequently he was about in the neighbourhood, various occasions, in the hope of meeting her, but in this expectation

Not for an evening residence recipitate—she ber-

self had any reason more than her aunt for thinking ill of him; and in his own heart he hoped and believed that Florina had not put faith in Lady Saxondale's story. Thus Deveril buoyed himself up with the idea that Florina herself had not turned against him, but at all events that if her suspicion or her jealousy had been excited, a word of explanation from his lips would clear up everything. He was therefore most anxious to find an opportunity of seeing her: but the whole week passed away without furnishing him such an occasion.

On her part Florina learnt from her aunt that he had called a second time and had also sent letters, but that his visit had been refused and his communications returned to him. It was only in a casual manner and in the course of conversation that Lady Macdonald mentioned these circumstances to her niece; for, as before stated, she entertained not the slightest suspicion that the young lady experienced any degree of interest in William Deveril. But what did Florina think of the young man's pertinacity in seeking to communicate with her aunt? She could only set it down to a brazen effrontery: and her unfavourable opinion of him was thus materially enhanced.

"He knows not," she said to herself, "that it was I who was indiscreet and imprudent enough to repair to his country-residence, and even penetrate up to the very threshold of his door, on that night when the fatal truth of his profligacy was made known to me. No—he could not suppose for an instant that I should have taken such a step—that I should have compromised myself in such a manner! He therefore fancies that the mode in which he is living is utterly unknown to me, and that therefore it is but Lady Saxondale's story which he has to explain away. This he seeks to do through the medium of my aunt, in the hope that if he succeeded therein he would stand on the same footing as heretofore in respect to myself. Alas, alas! the deeper the insight I obtain into William Deveril's character, the greater does his duplicity appear. Ah! and I who would have trusted my happiness to such a man—Oh! what a wreck should I have made of it. Better, better far to become the wife of Edmund Saxondale, who simulates no virtues, and therefore in his vices is at least free from hypocrisy, than

bestow my hand on William Deveril, who is all deceit, all falsehood. I must banish his image from my memory —would that I had not loved him as I have! But after all, the lesson is perhaps intended by heaven to render me obedient to the wishes of my relatives, and entrust my happiness to their guidance. Surely, surely, my aunt, who has been so kind and good to me, can have but one motive in wishing me to espouse Edmund Saxondale?—and that motive is for the best. I will accept my destiny—and henceforth will be ruled by her who has supplied to me a mother's place."

Such was the train of reflections into which Lady Florina Staunton fell one evening, at the expiration of the week which had elapsed since the discoveries made concerning Deveril. She was seated in an apartment which looked upon the garden at the back of the house. The window was open—the bright green foliage of the trees outside waved around the iron railings of the balcony—and the perfume of the flowers was wafted into the room. There was a gentle breeze fraught with a refreshing influence after the sickly warmth of a sultry day; and Florina stepped forth upon the balcony to woo the cooling zephyr to her throbbing brows and flushed countenance. For her cheeks had a hectic red, and seemed to burn with the fever-heat which was upon her and which had arisen from the troubled state of her mind.

It has already been stated in a previous chapter that there was a means of egress from the premises at the back part of the house. This consisted of a side-gate opening from the garden into a carriage-way that ran between Lady Macdonald's mansion and the adjoining one, the stables belonging to both being at the bottom. As Florina stepped forth on the balcony, from the height where she stood she could see over the enclosure-wall into the alley just spoken of, and it was with feelings which suddenly became strangely agitated and conflicting that she beheld the object of her thought—William Deveril!

Yes—there he was, standing in the lane, evidently watching for her appearance; and the ejaculation of joy which burst from his lips the moment she stepped forth upon the balcony, reached her ears in the stillness of evening. Her first impulse was to retreat: but a still more powerful feel-

ing held her riveted where she stood. What followed was the work of an instant. Deveril flew to the gate—tore it open—and rushed into the garden. There was something which struck Florina as so audacious, so full of a matchless effrontery in this proceeding, that all her patrician dignity came to her aid in a moment. Drawing herself up to her full height, she waved her hand, saying, "Depart, sir—dare not to intrude yourself within the privacy of this garden!"

Deveril stopped suddenly short beneath the balcony, and gazed up with a look so full of astonishment and mournful reproach—so full of mingled tenderness and deprecating sorrow—that Florina felt a gush of ineffable emotions swelling up from her heart, making her bosom throb, and producing a suffocating sensation in the throat,—so that her whole appearance grew suddenly changed and she seemed melting, yielding!

"Lady Florina," said William Deveril, "I beseech you to grant me a few minutes' interview. It shall be to say that everything is at an end between us, if you will—but let me not be discarded for ever from your heart in consequence of a vile calumny. After everything which has taken place between us, I have a right to expect the opportunity of giving an explanation—and you can scarcely be so cruel or unjust as to refuse me one."

The young man spoke in a subdued but earnest voice. He spoke thus in a low tone for fear of being overheard at other windows or by the neighbours; but so clear was his voice in its masculine melody, and so earnest were his accents in their manly pleading, that not a syllable was lost to Lady Florina's ears, although the balcony in which she stood was a considerable height from the ground. Then too, as she gazed down upon that young man whose personal beauty was of so fascinating a character, and whose form was so perfect in its statuelike symmetry—the music of his voice, too, flowing with such tender earnestness upon the evening zephyr, as if the melody of the human soul mingled with the perfumes which the flower sent forth—Lady Florina felt all her stern resolves thawing away, and the hostile feelings which had frozen in ice round her heart melting beneath the influence of reviving tenderness. Still she answered not immediately, but with a softening and mournful look

gazed down upon him whom she had loved so tenderly and so well, and whom she would give the world to be able to love again!

"Ah! I see that you have believed the tale which has reached your ears," resumed Deveril as he anxiously watched her looks and thought that he understood all that was passing in her mind: "but now that you see me you can believe it no longer! Lady Florina, will you descend for a few minutes into the garden? or will you tell me how I may forward a letter to you? I have longed—Oh! I have longed to write, but was fearful of committing an indiscretion—afraid of compromising you—"

"Compromising me!" echoed Florina, with an access of scornful feeling, a sudden and total change taking place within her all in a moment, effected by that talismanic word which he had so unfortunately uttered: for she felt that she had indeed been compromised by having been beguiled into an avowal of love to that young man who dwelt privately with an opera-dancer. "Compromised!" she repeated bitterly: "Oh, you have already compromised me too much with myself!—and I know not how it is that I have so far forgotten all the proper pride of my position and my sex, to linger here even for the few moments that I have suffered you to address me."

Another instant, and Florina had disappeared from the balcony! She flitted away like an apparition—thus abruptly retreating into her apartment; and it seemed as if by magic that she had gone so suddenly. The easement was immediately closed; and Deveril, almost staggered by the blow, felt as if hope had suddenly perished within him.

"Good heavens!" he murmured bitterly. "has Lady Saxondale so successfully spread the venom of her calumny?"

He lingered for a few moments, gazing up at that balcony where the bright and beautiful object of his adoration had just before stood, and whence she had vanished as swiftly as hope also had vanished from his own heart. All in an instant he felt that he should be wrong to remain any longer there; and with a deep sigh he turned away. But as he issued forth from the garden gate, he came in somewhat violent contact with an individual who was about to enter. They both retreated a step or two,

and their lips gave ejaculatory utterance to each other's names.

"Ah! William Deveril!"

"Lord Harold Staunton!"

And then there was a pause, during which the young nobleman looked strangely upon the youthful artist—while the latter had some difficulty in recovering from the confusion into which this most disagreeable and unexpected encounter had thrown him.

"May I inquire, sir," at length said Lord Harold sternly, "what you are doing here?"

"I came," at once responded William Deveril, "to give certain explanations which I have sought to give by all legitimate means—"

"I understand from my aunt, Lady Macdonald," interrupted Lord Harold Staunton, "that she has forbidden you the house, and that you have been persecuting her with calls and letters. I presume therefore that you have now been endeavouring to force your way into my aunt's presence—or that you penetrated hither for that purpose, but think better of it, were meeting a precipitate rebuff—"

"Your lordship must put what construction you will upon my conduct," returned Deveril, in like but firmly; and he was determined to say nothing that should compromise Florina.

"What! you dare treat the matter thus coolly?" exclaimed Lord Harold. "Know you not, sir, that a nephew is bound to protect his aunt against such intrusion, or attempted intrusion as this?"

"I am well aware that my conduct must seem suspicious," replied Deveril, still calm and unexcited—and he was inwardly rejoiced to perceive that Lord Harold Staunton entertained not the slightest suspicion that it was to seek an interview with his sister and not with his aunt, that he (Deveril) had come thither.

"Suspicious indeed!" exclaimed the young nobleman, working himself up into a rage. "It is more than suspicious, sir—it is downright imprudent—in short, it is conduct which deserves personal chastisement. pity it is that no lacquey was at hand to kick you out of the premises into which you have dared intrude."

"My lord," said Deveril, his cheeks now reddening, "it would grieve me sorely to aggravate the impropriety of my conduct by saying anything harsh to you: but I must beg to remind your

lordship that you are using language which I cannot listen to without indignation. I am well aware that I have been indiscreet in entering Lady Macdonald's premises in a surreptitious manner: but I have not done so without some excuse. Vilely calumniated. I was refused admittance at her ladyship's front-door—my letters were returned unopened—and not choosing to incur her ladyship's evil opinion without giving explanations on my own part to vindicate my character, I certainly sought admittance into her dwelling."

"You have been expelled from her front door, and your letters have been returned unopened?" exclaimed Harold Staunton, repeating Deveril's words in a taunting manner. 'Surely those indications were sufficient to convince you that your presence could be dispensed with: and any attempt to intrude again becomes an act of the grossest rudeness and most flagrant indecency. We will not however discuss the question farther. You must give me satisfaction, sir, for your impertinence."

"My lord," replied Deveril, now assuming a haughty dignity, which as he was no aristocrat, was entirely his own—the natural pride of a man of high feeling,—"had you spoken in other terms I should certainly have held myself bound to make an apology for my intrusion within the precincts of Lady Macdonald's dwelling. Indeed, I have already said as much as to express my sense of its impropriety, and therefore my sorrow that I should have been guilty of such conduct. But, considering the term which your lordship now thinks fit to adopt towards me, I decline to offer a single word in the shape of excuse or apology."

"Ah! is this your decision?" exclaimed Lord Harold fiercely.

"It is—most positively," returned Deveril, with increasing hauteur.

"Then," immediately rejoined the nobleman, "you will name the friend to whom I may send mine."

"What! would you provoke me to a duel?" cried Deveril, who had scarcely apprehended that it was Harold's intention to push matters to this extreme—and his heart smote him at the idea of standing up in a hostile manner against the brother of her whom he loved so devotedly.

"I have already told you, Mr. Deveril," was Staunton's answer, 'that you must afford me satisfaction. I do not

wish to give any unseemly provocation on my part: but as it appears," he added scornfully, "that you yourself require some such inducement to make you show your courage, I am forced to act thus. Consider, sir, that I have given you a blow:—and with the tips of his fingers he touched Deveril on the cheek.

"Enough, Lord Harold!" exclaimed the young artist, his own spirit now thoroughly aroused. "You have asked me to name my friend—I refer you to Mr. Forester, whose apartments are in the Albany."

"I have some slight knowledge of Mr. Forester," responded Lord Harold, "and will lose no time in sending a friend to communicate with him."

He then bowed coldly and distantly, and turning his heel, walked away without entering the precincts of his aunt's dwelling.

William Deveril lingered for a few moments to let him get to a distance, and then likewise proceeded up the lane into Cavendish Square.

We may here observe that on quitting the balcony, Lady Florina retreated into another apartment, which did not command a view of the garden nor of the premises at the back of the house. She therefore did not observe that William Deveril, on issuing forth from the enclosure, had encountered her brother in the alley.

Deveril bent his way direct to the Albany, where he inquired for Mr. Forester; but learning that this gentleman was not in at the moment, he penned a hurried note to prepare him for the visit which he might expect from Lord Harold's friend in the course of the evening. Having left this note with the porter of the Albany, Deveril proceeded to his lodgings in Pall Mall; on reaching which he immediately sat down at his writing-table and wrote the following lines:—

"Pall Mall, $\frac{1}{2}$ past 8 o'clock.

'Dearest Angela,

"I promised you to be home by supper-time this evening: but urgent business retains me in town. I intend to sleep at my lodgings, but hope to be with you early in the forenoon to-morrow.

Your affectionate

"WILLIAM."

This note Deveril at once despatched by a porter in a cab to his villa-residence in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park. He then resumed his writing, and penned several letters. The first was also to Angela—another was to Mr. Gunthorpe—a third to Florina, and the others to friends or acquaintances. The task had occupied him nearly two hours; and when he had finished this correspondence, he sealed the several letters and packed them all up together in a sheet of paper. He then wrote upon the outside of the envelope, "*It is earnestly requested that the letters contained herein, may be delivered immediately to their respective addresses.*" He then locked up the packet in his writing-desk, and put the key in his pocket.

It was now half-past ten o'clock; and a double knock at the front-door resounded through the house. In a few moments Mr. Forester was announced. He was a young man of four-and-twenty, with a pleasing countenance, a genteel figure, and an air of mingled good-nature and frankness.

"My dear Deveril," he said, taking our hero's hand, "how the deuce have you managed to get yourself into this scrape with Lord Harold Staunton—you who are of such a peaceable disposition and excellent temper?"

Deveril gave Mr. Forester a hurried outline of what had taken place—or rather of such particulars as he thought fit to describe,—leaving Florina's name altogether out of the question, and suffering his friend to retain a similar impression to that which Lord Harold himself had received in respect to his intrusion into the garden; namely, that it was to seek an interview with Lady Macdonald, for the purpose of explaining away Lady Saxondale's calumnies.

"Well, it is an unpleasant business," said Forester: "but it seems there is no alternative save to exchange shots. Of course you know, Deveril—and mind, I do not say it because I think it will make any undue impression on your mind—but it is my duty to mention the fact, that Lord Harold Staunton is what is termed—"

"I know what you mean," observed Deveril quietly, "a crack shot. I have heard it mentioned that he has performed the most astonishing feats with the pistol."

"I have seen him," rejoined Forester. "But you, my dear fellow—what

sort of a marksman do you consider yourself?"

"I have never practised, and scarcely ever fired a pistol in my life," responded Deveril. "Besides, you do not think for a moment, Forester, that I mean seriously to attempt the taking of my adversary's life?"

"You will be insane if you do not," was his friend's answer: "for if you risk your own life, you certainly ought to do your best—"

"Enough upon that point," interrupted Deveril, "At all events I shall do my duty. And now tell me, have you received a visit from his lordship's friend?"

"Captain Lennox of the Guards called upon me at half-past nine o'clock," replied Forester. "I had just returned to my rooms in the Albany, and had received your note, which not a little astonished me. However, everything is settled. You had better come and pass the night with me—we will have supper and champagne, and so forth—"

"Thank you—but I must decline your hospitality. I will breakfast with you at any hour you name in the morning."

"That must be at five punctually," rejoined Forester: "for we have to be upon the ground at half past six o'clock."

"And which is the appointed place?" asked Deveril.

"The fields in the immediate vicinity of Hampstead Heath. By the bye, Captain Lennox undertook to bring the regimental surgeon with him; and therefore we need not trouble ourselves on that point. Have you got pistols? No. Well I will take mine—and at all events you will have the benefit of good ones. And now, what are you going to do with yourself? You will not come with me to my rooms—shall I stay with you? or shall we go out together for an hour or two?"

"I wish to remain alone," answered Deveril. "Do not think me rude or churlish, nor insensible to your kind intention—"

"Not at all, my dear fellow," exclaimed Forester. "In these circumstances one does exactly as one chooses. Good night, then. You will be with me at five?"

"Not a minute later," answered Deveril; and Mr. Forester thereupon took his leave of the young artist.

CHAPTER XL.

THE DUEL.

IF we look into Lord Harold Staunton's lodgings in Jermyn Street, at precisely the same time when the preceding interview took place between Forester and Deveril in Pall Mall, we shall find that nobleman seated alone in his drawing-room. Captain Lennox had just left him, having communicated the arrangements made with Mr. Foster, and having settled the hour of appointment when they were to meet again in the morning.

Lord Harold's countenance was grave and serious. It was not that he feared the duel, nor dreaded its consequences in respect to himself: but he scarcely admired the part he had played in provoking it.

"When once I stand in the presence of William Deveril," he said to himself, "I cannot help taking a deadly aim at him. It is for this purpose I have provoked the duel—and I almost wish that what has been done could be safely and honourably undone. But no: that is impossible! I am a fool," he suddenly exclaimed, speaking aloud and rising from his seat, "to let these feelings, grow upon me. What is a duel after all? It is an incident in the life of every man of the world, and is fraught with an *eclat* of flattering nature. Well, but somehow or another I cannot see the thing in this light on the present occasion. Pshaw! this is drivelling folly—I will and must be gay!"

Scarcely had he spoken these words, when a loud double knock reverberated through the house; and Lord Saxondale was speedily introduced.

"A pretty fellow you are, Harold, to make an appointment with me to dine at Long's and then break it. So I had to dine by myself. Good turtle and venison, however—and iced-punch excellent. Those were consolations."

"You must forgive me, my dear fellow," answered Staunton; "but some particular business kept me away from you. However, we can now go out and pass an hour or two together."

"What the deuce is the matter with you?" asked Edmund, surveying his friend with attention: "you have a strange look, and a sort of forced gaiety. Has anything happened? I

hope nothing bad. Perhaps your creditors have been dunning you—"

"Well, it is something of that sort," observed Staunton, compelling himself to laugh, although he was not altogether in the humour. "But come—let us go and amuse ourselves somewhere."

"That is exactly what I wish," returned Saxondale. "Emily Archer is dancing away to-night at the opera—and she will not have me to escort her home."

"What do you mean? You have broken with her already."

"Not I indeed! I mean that since I am going to amuse myself with you she must amuse herself alone for once. Come."

The two young noblemen now strolled forth together. First of all they visited the gaming-table; and Saxondale, though by no means a shrewd observer, could not avoid noticing a continuation of that peculiarity which he had already seen in his friend's manner: but Harold had his own reasons for saying nothing to Edmund relative to the pending duel. He gambled recklessly, and drank large draughts of wine. His purse was well filled with money: for the reader will recollect that he had received a thousand-pound-note in the morning from the unknown lady of the masquerade. At least three hundred pounds of this sum he lost in about half-an-hour; and then suddenly flinging down the dice box, he said to his friend, "Come Saxondale—I have had enough of this. Let us be off."

Sallying forth from the gambling-house, the two young noblemen visited the cider-cellars—then looked in at the *Coal Hole*—and subsequently bestowed the honour of their presence upon three or four other places of the same sort,—Lord Harold everywhere drinking immoderately. At two o'clock in the morning they wound up their amusements with a supper of devilled kidneys and Welch rabbits at *Evan's* in Covent Garden; and then they separated, Lord Saxondale going home uncommonly tipsy in a cab, and Lord Harold Staunton proceeding to Jermyn Street on foot, that the fresh air of the morning might cool his heated brows. Not that he himself was intoxicated. He could always imbibe with impunity a large quantity of liquor; and though within the last few hours he had partaken of far more than even on such

occasions he was wont to do, yet he scarcely felt the effects thereof.

On entering his lodgings he bade Alfred—to whom he had confidentially communicated the pending duel—call him precisely at five o'clock: he then threw himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, and sank into a troubled and agitated sleep.

"But we must now transport the reader's attention to Mr. Forester's rooms in the Albany, and suppose that the hour of five in the morning was being proclaimed from all steeples of the West End. Punctual to his appointment, William Deveril made his appearance. Forester grasped him cordially by the hand, and surveyed him earnestly to see how he bore the prospect of the life-and-death affair about to take place. The young artist seemed as cool and collected as ever; and a stranger gazing upon him would not have known that there was anything unusual in his mind. He was dressed with his usual neatness, and appeared as if he had enjoyed several hours of calm and refreshing sleep.

An excellent breakfast was served up, of which Deveril partook. When it was over Mr. Forester looked at his watch, saying, "It is now half-past five—my carriage will be at the door in ten minutes. If you have anything particular to say, you had better do so at once."

"I have but one request to make," answered Deveril, producing a small key from his pocket. "Take this—it opens the writing-desk at my lodgings. If I fall, you will know what to do."

"Depend upon it, my dear fellow," returned Forester, "whatever your instructions are they shall be fully and faithfully attended to. Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing," responded Deveril, "except to express my thanks for your kindness."

Mr. Forester's valet entered the room to announce that the carriage was in waiting. That gentleman now produced from a cupboard an ominous-looking box in a green baize bag: and this the valet at once conveyed down to the carriage. Forester and Deveril followed and took their seats in the vehicle, which then drove rapidly away.

During the ride to Hampstead the two gentlemen conversed upon indifferent matters; and Deveril showed that young as he was—being as the reader is aware, scarcely twenty, though he

looked a year or two older—he possessed a firm and courageous mind. Not that he treated the matter with unbecoming flippancy—very far from it: there was a certain gravity and sedateness in his mien and tone which became the position wherein he was placed, but which was as far removed from the sentiment of fear as it was from levity.

On reaching the heath, Forester and Deveril left the carriage, which drove away to a distance so as not to excite suspicion in the neighbourhood; and they proceeded on foot to the appointed place. Forester had purposely put on a loose over-coat that he might carry the pistol-case concealed beneath it; for the ominous looking box before referred to, was the one containing the deadly weapons. It was twenty minutes past six as they entered the field where the duel was to take place; and the quick glance which Forester threw around showed him that they were first upon the ground.

It was a beautiful morning: the sun was already shining brightly—the birds were singing in the trees—and nature, reviving from the lethargy of night, was arraying herself in her most cheerful smiles. Deveril could not help heaving a sigh as he reflected how perverse was the heart of man, that by its passions it could lead to the desecration of a world which the Creator had made so fair and beautiful and the joyousness of which too often formed so strong a contrast with the deeds enacted by its human denizens.

His meditations were however cut short by a sudden ejaculation from the lips of Forester, who cried out, "Here they come!"—and Deveril, looking in the direction where his friend's eyes were fixed, beheld his opponent accompanied by two individuals advancing across the field.

Lord Harold Staunton, ere quitting his lodgings, had made certain hasty improvements in his toilet: nevertheless his appearance was not altogether characterised by the same degree of neatness as that of William Deveril. On the contrary, he looked as if he had passed a portion of the night in a debauch. His companions were Captain Lennox and the military surgeon. The former was a fine tall man, of commanding appearance, and evidently of great physical strength; he wore a moustache, which together with his thick brows and keen piercing eyes,

gave him a certain fierceness of look; while his air was haughty, self-sufficient, and aristocratic. As for the surgeon, he was altogether of an opposite appearance—being short and stout, with a rubicund face and a particularly red nose, as if he were amazingly addicted to the pleasures of the table.

Lord Harold bowed with distant politeness to Mr. Deveril, who returned the salutation in a similar manner. The two seconds—namely, Captain Lennox and Mr. Forester—almost instantaneously proceeded to a settlement of the preliminaries,—measuring the ground, and loading the pistols in each other's presence,—during which proceeding the military surgeon walked apart, and while pretending to blow his nose, applied a brandy-flask to his lips. The seconds, having made their arrangements, placed their principals in their proper stations; and thus, to use Captain Lennox's military phrase, “the ground was made clear for action!”

“You have nothing more to say to me beyond the instructions already given?” inquired Mr. Forester of Deveril, as he handed him a loaded pistol.

“Nothing,” was the answer, returned in a tone of grave firmness.

“Then there need be no farther delay,” rejoined Mr. Forester. “It is arranged that Captain Lennox will give the signal. Observe where he has now taken his place with a white kerchief in his hand. When he drops that kerchief, you will avert your head, raise the pistol, and fire.”

Deveril intimated that he understood these instructions: and Mr. Forester drew aside to a little distance, so as to avoid the chance of receiving Lord Harold's bullet. This nobleman had in the meantime received his weapon from Captain Lennox, who had immediately after posted himself in such a position that he formed with the two duelists the apex of a triangle. The military doctor had seated himself under a hedge, where he regaled himself with a second dose of the contents of the brandy-flask to settle the qualms of an empty stomach.

Everything was now ready; but just at the very instant that Captain Lennox was about to let the hand-kerchief fall, a loud stentorian voice roared out, “Stop!”

All eyes being turned in the direction whence this command emanated,

the unmistakable figure of Mr. Gunthorpe was seen clambering over a gate in the hedge close by where the doctor was seated. Up jumped the medical gentleman, as much startled as if a whole posse of policemen had appeared upon the spot: but on perceiving that the new comer was alone, he regained his self-possession, and deliberately took a third pull at the brandy-flask. Over the gate did Mr. Gunthorpe scramble,—his naturally red face being quite purple with excitement, while the perspiration rolled in large drops down it; and his brown scratch wig had got turned all awry under his broad-brimmed hat. He brandished his gold-headed cane as if it were a constable's staff, and rolled along on his little fat legs towards the spot where the duelists and their seconds stood.

“Who the deuce is this?” exclaimed Captain Lennox, twirling his moustache. “I suppose it's some justice of the peace ——”

“No, sir,” interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe, who had just arrived near enough to catch the remark. “I do not come in a magisterial capacity ——”

“I should think not indeed!” observed Lord Harold contemptuously. Magistrates and country-justices don't usually take up their quarters at a boiled-beef house on Holborn Hill.”

“This affair can proceed no farther,” said Mr. Gunthorpe, bestowing not the slightest heed upon Lord Harold Staunton's insolent observation: but placing himself midway between the two duelists he said, “I did not choose to involve you all in exposure by bringing the police authorities with me; but I am nevertheless determined to put a stop to this business. So if you mean to fire, gentlemen, I must become your target.”

William Deveril had started with astonishment on seeing Mr. Gunthorpe; and Forester, observing the effect thus produced by that gentleman's presence, hastily inquired of Deveril if he knew who he was?

“Yes—I do indeed know who he is; and have every reason to do so,” responded the young artist. “He is one to whom I am under many obligations. But it is most provoking that he should have found us out!”

“Oh! he must not be allowed to interfere in this way,” added Forester. “I will see what Lennox says.”

He and the Captain thereupon

accosted Mr. Gunthorpe, and asked him by what right he strove to put a stop to this affair of honour?

"An affair of honour do you call it?" exclaimed the old gentleman indignantly and scornfully. "I pronounce it to be an affair of dishonour—"

"Beware, sir, what you say!" interrupted Captain Lennox fiercely: "for with that remark you impeach the characters of all concerned—and if you dare repeat your insolence, I shall be compelled to pull your nose for you."

"It is a great pity, sir," rejoined Mr. Gunthorpe, "that the people should have to pay taxes to maintain a set of military bullies of whom you are a very fair specimen."

"By Jove, this is too much!" ejaculated Captain Lennox, "I must chastise you, sir."

"And I will knock you down with my cane, if you dare touch me," at once retorted Mr. Gunthorpe, holding his stick in a manner which showed that he was serious.

"Don't hurt the old gentleman," said Mr. Forester, seizing the arm of Captain Lennox who was about to commit a prompt onslaught on Mr. Gunthorpe. "Let us endeavour to reason with him."

"You will not reason me into giving my consent to this duel," observed the object of the remark. "And so you call it an affair of honour, do you? What! is it honourable for two young men to stand up and endeavour to take each other's life, for some trumpery cause or another?"

"Permit me to ask," interrupted Mr. Forester, "whether you are acquainted with the motives and causes which have led to the present meeting?"

"No—I am not," at once rejoined Mr. Gunthorpe; "and what is more, I do not want to know them. It is sufficient for me that by an accident I ascertained what was going to take place; and so I hastened off to prevent it."

"I will tell you what we must do," exclaimed Captain Lennox: "we must tie the old fellow to yon gate, or else to a tree."

"Yes—that's the way to dispose of him," said Lord Harold, who for the last two or three minutes had not been mingling in the conversation.

"No," said Deveril, now advancing towards the group in the middle of the ground: "I will permit no indig-

nity to be offered to Mr. Gunthorpe. At the same time I must earnestly represent to Mr. Gunthorpe himself, that he will see the impropriety of persevering in this attempt to stop this proceeding."

"What! such words as these from your lips, William Deveril?" said the old gentleman reproachfully.

"My dear sir," responded the young artist, "I have admitted to Mr. Forester that I am acquainted with you—and your presence here may therefore be construed in a light prejudicial to my character."

"Oh! they will say that you were afraid to fight, and that you got a friend to stop the duel—will they?" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe. "Well then, I pledge my honour that such is not the case. Indeed, it was quite in another way I learnt what was going on—"

"We are not bound to believe you, sir," remarked Captain Lennox stiffly; "and therefore, as Mr. Deveril has observed, you will only prejudice his honour by persisting in your interruption."

"Nevertheless, I do persist," said Mr. Gunthorpe resolutely.

"Then, sir, we must remove you by force," at once rejoined the Captain; and with a sudden movement he wrenched the gold-headed cane out of Mr. Gunthorpe's hands.

He and Forester together, then dragged the old gentleman off towards the gate, which they managed to do despite his struggles and resistance.

"Deveril—William Deveril!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe, in accents of mingled anger and reproach: "is it possible that you stand idly by and see this indignity committed? What, sir! you do not move?—I am ashamed of you!—I am astonished at you! After all—But I will have nothing more to do with you. Lord Harold, you too shall smart for permitting this! Will you not help me? Oh! you refuse, do you? Well, mind what you are about! You will repent it, I say—you will repent it! Deveril, you declared you would not see me illtreated—and yet you—you—"

While thus giving vent to broken ejaculations, poor Mr. Gunthorpe, breathless and exhausted with his cries and his struggles, was hurried up to the gate; and there Captain Lennox and Mr. Forester bound him securely to the rails with their handkerchiefs.

Lord Harold laughed contemptuously at the old gentleman's threats: but William Deveril stood with his arms folded, his looks bent down, his face pale, and his lips white and quivering. He said not a word; and yet it was evident that he deeply felt the indignity offered to Mr. Gunthorpe.

The Captain and Mr. Forester, having done their work, hastened back to the measured ground in order to hurry on the proceedings as quick as possible, so as to prevent farther interruption. The military surgeon walked up to Mr. Gunthorpe, who was struggling desperately to emancipate himself from his bonds; and producing his brandy-flask, he offered to pour some down the captive's throat, "in order to soothe him." But Mr. Gunthorpe bade him begone with such fierce indignation, that the doctor did not persist in his proposal.

Meanwhile Captain Lennox had resumed his former position, with the white handkerchief ready to drop: Lord Harold and William Deveril again found themselves confronted according to the laws of honour—the signal was given—but only one pistol was fired. That one was Lord Harold Staunton's. Deveril however stood unhurt.

"You did not fire, sir!" exclaimed Captain Lennox to the young artist.

"It was not my intention," was the latter's cold but firm reply. "It was I who provoked this duel—"

"Enough! say nothing, Deveril!" interrupted Mr. Forester. "I presume that Lord Harold Staunton is now satisfied?" he added, turning towards that individual.

The young nobleman hesitated what reply to give. His better feelings prompted him to answer in the affirmative: but the empire which the lady of the masquerade had acquired over him, became paramount—he felt that to obtain the crowning favour of her love he must prosecute the murderous game still farther—and his decision was therefore taken accordingly.

"I cannot consider it an act of bravery on Mr. Deveril's part to abstain from firing," he said: "but I choose to regard it as a proof that he was resolved to avoid the chance of a second exchange of shots. Therefore I am not satisfied."

"We must proceed, 'Mr. Forester,'" said Captain Lennox, with cold-blooded laconism.

"This is nothing short of downright

savage butchery and barbarous murder!" vociferated Mr. Gunthorpe, now struggling more desperately than ever to extricate himself from his bonds. "Deveril—Lord Harold—"

But here the old gentleman's throat became so dry with excitement and hoarseness, that his voice failed him and he could say no more.

Fresh pistols had in the meanwhile been handed to Lord Harold Staunton and William Deveril—Captain Lennox again took his post—the signal with the white handkerchief was given—and a sharp report rang through the morning air. Again was it Lord Harold's weapon that was alone fired: but this time not without effect—for Deveril dropped upon the grass!

"You have murdered him!" cried Mr. Gunthorpe, now suddenly recovering his voice: and with a superhuman effort he broke away from the gate to which he had been bound.

The military surgeon was already rushing to the spot where Forester and Lennox were raising Mr. Deveril. Lord Harold, much agitated, likewise lent his assistance. The young man's eyes were closed—his shirt and waistcoat over his right breast were already saturated with blood—his lips moved not—the breath of life appeared to waver there no more!

"Fly, fly!" exclaimed the military surgeon: "he is dead; it is useless for you to remain."

"Dead! My God, is it possible? Dead! no—no!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe, who now reached the spot: and falling upon his knees, he bent over the inanimate form of William Deveril.

"Here, sir," said Mr. Forester "You are innocent of any hand in all this—take that key—it opens a desk at poor Deveril's lodgings and there you will find certain instructions to be fulfilled. For God's sake, do not neglect them."

Thus speaking, Forester thrust the key into the hands of Mr. Gunthorpe, who was sobbing and weeping over the young artist as if his heart would break. Forester then sped away, along with Lord Harold Staunton and Captain Lennox—Mr. Gunthorpe and the surgeon alone remaining with him who had fallen in the duel.

It must not however be thought that Forester meant to leave them to manage as they might in the matter. He made straight for the spot where he was to meet his carriage, and or-

dered it to proceed as near to the field as it possibly could get—likewise giving instructions to his domestics that they were to hurry to the scene, render what assistance they were able in removing the body into the vehicle, and then hold themselves entirely at the orders of Mr. Gunthorpe. Having done this Forester rejoined Lord Harold and Captain Lennox, and hastened away with them in their own vehicle.

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CHAPTER XLI.

MORE SCENES AT SAXONDALE HOUSE

It was about half-past ten o'clock at night, when the tall form of a man, with a hat slouched over his countenance, and muffled in a cloak, advanced hurriedly up Park Lane. Considering that it was the middle of summer, it was doubtless somewhat singular for an individual to be thus apparelled; and such a superfluity as a capacious mantle could only be for the purpose of disguise. So thought the policeman who was sauntering leisurely down the street: but in that aristocratic quarter the constable could not think of interfering with the object of his notice. He set it down as some affair of gallantry, and proceeded on his way.

The muffled figure stopped at the door of Saxondale House—knocked and rang—and during the few moments that elapsed ere his summons was answered appeared excessively impatient and nervous. The door was however soon opened; and at once entering the hall, he himself, anticipating the functions of the porter, shut the door quickly; then removing his hat he revealed the countenance of Lord Harold Staunton. He likewise threw off his cloak—at the same time saying in an agitated manner to the porter, "Of course you know what has occurred? Hence this disguise! Is Lord Saxondale at home?"

"No, my lord—he is not," was the

mediately rejoined Harold: "and she will tell me—for it is highly important that I should see my friend. Is her ladyship within?"

"Yes, my lord" responded the porter.

"And alone—disengaged? But perhaps the young ladies are with her?"

"No, my lord: they are gone to a party, and her ladyship is alone."

The hall-porter, to whose ears certain flying rumours of the duel had been wafted, was at no loss to understand wherefore Staunton had come thus disguised, nor why his looks were wild and haggard. But he of course made no remark in allusion to the subject; and forthwith summoning a footman, desired him to escort Lord Harold to the room where Lady Saxondale was seated. This was accordingly done: and in a few moments the young nobleman found himself alone with her ladyship.

"Perhaps you did not expect to see me here to night?" he said, throwing himself upon a seat near the sofa where Lady Saxondale was placed.

"Indeed I did not," she answered coldly; "and I am much surprised that you should come at this hour and under such circumstances."

"You are surprised?" ejaculated Staunton, now gazing upon her with amazement—the most unfeigned. "Have I not fulfilled your injunctions?—yes, even to the very letter!"

"My lord," answered Lady Saxondale, haughtily but still with some degree of astonishment, "I am at a loss to understand you. Reports of what happened this morning have reached me, and I therefore can come to no other conclusion than that your reason is affected."

"Lady Saxondale," cried Staunton, starting up from his seat as if goaded almost to madness by this unlooked-for reception, "is it possible that you can treat me in such a manner? Now, do not think that though I may seem excited I have in any way compromised you with the servants; for I purposely asked after Edmund first, and appeared to wish to see you only as the result of a second thought and for the purpose of ascertaining where Edmund is."

"Compromise me with my servants!" said Lady Saxondale, slowly rising from the sofa; and drawing herself up to the full of her superb height,

she bent her magnificent dark eyes with eagle look upon the astounded young nobleman: "I am at a loss, my lord, to understand such language. Think you that because your sister is engaged to become my son's wife that you possess the privilege of having the run of the house—to enter it at such an hour as this—force your way into my presence—No, my lord!"

Harold had remained stupefied while Lady Saxondale was thus speaking: but when she ceased, a sudden rage seized upon him, quick as the gust of the whirlwind sweeps over the ocean; and while his eyes flashed fire and his lips were white with rage, he said in a thick hoarse voice, "Madam, your conduct is abominable!"

"This to me?" cried Lady Saxondale: and she reached her hand towards the bell-pull.

"No!" ejaculated Staunton: "you must not add this crowning ignomony—or I will kill you—by the eternal heaven, I will kill you!"

Lady Saxondale seemed suddenly dismayed, and her countenance became pale: but speedily recovering herself, she said, "It is but too evident that the calamity of this morning has turned your brain. I must not therefore be too hard upon you."

Thus speaking, she resumed her seat, with a slight relaxation from that cold dignity and freezing hauteur which for the last few minutes she had maintained, Lord Harold, still standing, fixed upon her the keenest scrutiny, as if to fathom what was really passing in her mind, and penetrate beneath the mask of studied reserve and repelling chillness which he fancied she had purposely put on. But at length resuming his own seat likewise, he said, "You have alluded to the calamity of this morning. Can you look me in the face and tell me that you really regard it as a calamity?"

"What!" cried Lady Saxondale: "to kill a person in a duel—is not this a calamity?"

"Stop!" said Lord Harold imperiously. "Does your ladyship know this?"—and he produced the diamond-clasp which he had worn on the front of his cap at the masquerade.

"No—certainly not," responded Lady Saxondale, just deigning to fling one glance upon the jewel.

"Nor this?" continued Lord Harold Staunton, next producing the letter which made the appointment for that self-same masquerade.

"What a question!" cried Lady Saxondale with a contemptuous curl of the lip. "As if I knew aught of your correspondence!"

"Then perhaps your ladyship is equally ignorant of this?"—and now he produced the letter which contained naught save a name—and that name was *William Deveril*!

"My lord, I begin to grow very weary indeed of these follies. I have put up with them for the last ten minutes out of compassion for your state of mind: but I must beg that they be not persevered in."

"Lady Saxondale," answered Lord Harold Staunton, with a strange and ominous outward calmness which rather denoted than concealed the pent-up fury of wrath and rage concentrated below: "it suits your purpose to treat me thus—but you will not succeed! No: it shall not be permitted to any woman to make use of me as her blind instrument for a particular object, and when that object is accomplished, cast me off. Nay, worse than cast me off—ignore my services and repudiate me altogether! Madam, it was you who sent me that clasp—you who wrote that letter—you also who penned that name inside the envelope, which moreover contained a certain sum of money."

"Lord Harold, your friends will have to put under restraint," responded Lady Saxondale.

"We shall see!" he rejoined drily. "Now, madam, you are giving me proof of the most matchless effrontery that ever woman displayed or that the world saw. Can you possibly maintain that it was not you yourself who gave me the appointment to be at the masquerade—you who enjoined me to remove your enemy from your path—you who wrote me the name of that enemy on this paper, that name being *William Deveril*? Madam, no earthly conjecture could I form as to who Queen Isabella of Spain might be, until the morning after the masquerade. But when I received this missive mentioning the name of the enemy with whom I was to seek a quarrel, provoke to a duel, and thus extirpate from your path, my suspicions instantaneously fixed themselves upon you. Suspicions?—no! It was a certainty—a conviction, beyond the possibility of doubt. And could you yourself have been so insensate as to hope that I should not fathom your secret? Why, all London was ringing with the affair between

William Deveril and yourself. He had insulted you—at least such was your story—and at all events you had taken the trouble to make the round of your acquaintances and spread the intelligence. There was a malignity in this conduct on your part which showed a determination to ruin William Deveril. What cause subsequently impelled you to wish his destruction, I know not: but that the Lady Saxondale to whom I am now speaking, was the Queen Isabella of Spain who gave me my mission at Harcourt House, I felt assured the moment I read the name of her enemy."

"I have listened to you in silence, if not with patience" said her ladyship, "because I was desirous to ascertain the real nature of the delusion under which you are labouring. I now begin to fathom it. You have mistaken some one else for me."

"No—it is not so!" answered Lord Harold vehemently. "I repeat that not until I read the name of your enemy, did I suspect who Queen Isabella of Spain could possibly be. But the instant that name met my eyes, I knew that it was Lady Saxondale. Yes—not merely because you had notoriously some strong cause of dislike against Deveril, but also because she who personated the Spanish Queen was of your stature—of your form—with the same dark eyes flashing from behind the mask—yes, and with same accents of the voice, despite the consummate art with which that voice was disguised! Lady Saxondale, if it were the last words that I had to speak in this life, it would be to proclaim to your face that you were the woman who urged me to this deed of assassination."

"Did I not firmly entertain the belief that your reason is impaired, I should not tolerate such conduct. Even as it is, I know not whether I am justified in permitting you to remain another instant in my presence?"—and as Lady Saxondale thus spoke, it was with a look so well corresponding with her words that for an instant Lord Harold Staunton felt himself staggered.

But only for an instant! The doubt vanished as quickly as it came, giving place to a conviction stronger than ever; and he said with a fiercer look and in a hoarser voice than before. "Lady Saxondale, I have become a murderer for your sake! The death of that young man sits heavy upon my heart: my conscience is a nest of scorpions. Oh! what I have done and what I now suffer, demand an im-

mense reward! That reward you promised me: that reward you shall give! it may be that your love-tale—which I was foolish enough to believe at the time, and have believed since until I stood in your presence ere now—it may be, I say, that this tale of love was but the coinage of your brain—an artful delusion adopted in order to model me to your purposes. Infatuated fool that I was, to put faith in it! Yet who would not have done so? who could have believed that there was treachery so foul—so damnable—in the heart of woman? But no matter. I did believe it: else never should I have suffered myself to become the instrument of your designs—never should I have availed myself of the opportunity which an unlooked-for accident furnished to provoke William Deveril to the duel of death. If you had really loved me, your love, Lady Saxondale, would have been some consolation for the crime I have committed and for the remorse which fastened its vulture-talons upon my soul the instant that deed was done! But if you do not love me—and if you sought to make me alike the instrument of your vengeance and the sport of your trickery, only to repudiate me afterwards, and perhaps laugh at me in secret—I will still demand my recompence—that I may be avenged on you, Madam, do you understand me?"

"I understand," was the patrician lady's response, "that I have a madman for my companion at this moment—and that if I thus bear patiently and kindly with him, it is only from compassion for his misfortune."

"Compassion? I scorn the word—I disdain to become the object of such a sentiment! Look you, Lady Saxondale—I am a desperate man. In a few short hours an immense change has been effected within me. Hitherto I have been the dissipated rake—the reckless rogue—the inconsiderate spendthrift; but now I have become the deep criminal—the man who bears about with him a remorse as the convict carries with him his chain. Ay—and the iron of that remorse is eating into my soul more deeply and with a more corroding agony than the iron of the chain can eat into the convict's flesh. What consolation, then, is there for me? A mad and a reckless career, composed of all the intoxicating influences that can drown thoughts, or the wild ecstasies and thrilling delights that can absorb reflection! Wine and women—deep

draughts of wine and the glowing embrace of superb and impassioned women—these are the only blandishments left for me! Into this catalogue do you enter: it is you who must head it—thereby fulfilling the promise that you gave!"

"Poor young man!" said Lady Saxon-dale, shaking her head: "what will become of you? As one whom I have known for a long time—as my son's bosom friend—as the brother of his future wife—and as the nephew of the esteemed and respected Lady Macdonald, I am bound to entertain some degree of sympathy for you. Besides, you appear to feel so deeply the calamity of this morning—"

"Oh, talk to me not thus!" ejaculated Harold, with rage upon his countenance. "If I am not mad already, you will drive me so. By heaven, you are grandly beautiful! I always considered you as eminently handsome; and since yesterday morning, when I first knew that you were the lady of the masquerade, I have feasted my imagination upon your charms. Yet never did they seem so magnificent as at this moment! Even in this very conduct which you are pursuing towards me—treacherous, ungrateful, and abominable as it is—there is something so tantalizing that I could scarcely wish it to be otherwise. It is the acrid olive giving flavour to the rich juice of the grape:"—and Lord Harold Staunton laughed wildly, almost with a maniac laugh, as he thus spoke.

"Now let this interview end," said Lady Saxon-dale, rising from the sofa: and despite the calm and dignified reserve, mingled with a slight expression of pity, which she wore outwardly, she was evidently not free from alarm within.

"Is it possible that you are serious and sternly resolved in treating me thus?" cried Lord Harold, in a wild mournful voice. "Woman, I have become a murderer for your sake! Yes—I tell you again that I knew it was you the instant I received the letter containing the name yesterday morning. And knowing it to be you, I did not to-day engage your son as my second—I did not even communicate to him the fact that a duel was pending. See, then, all the consideration I have manifested, in addition to the crime which I have perpetrated on your behalf! And now—"

"I say, my lord," interrupted Lady Saxon-dale, "that this interview must end!"

"No—the interview cannot end: but the foolish and insensate portion of it shall!" exclaimed Lord Harold: and with wide-extended arms, he sprang forward to clasp Lady Saxon-dale in his embrace.

A half-suppressed shriek escaped her lips as she retreated to the bell-pull: but at that very instant the door flew open, and in rushed Mabel the house-keeper, her countenance purple with rage.

"Save me—save me, Mabel, from this maniac!" cried Lady Saxon-dale, as if joyously catching at the circumstance of the woman's opportune appearance and not choosing to notice her wrathful looks.

"Eh—what?" screamed forth Mabel. "Lord Harold, who killed Deveril this morning! He here!"—and the woman looked unfeignedly astonished.

Lord Harold's extended arms dropped to his sides as if paralysed. He stood confounded for a few moments, uncertain how to act. He dared not pursue his present object any farther: for all in an instant it flashed to him that if a disturbance were created in the house, it might end by his falling into the hands of justice—and he by no means relished the idea of being committed to Newgate to take his trial for the disastrous issue of the duel. He therefore saw the necessity of yielding to circumstances; and advancing towards Lady Saxon-dale, he said in a quick hoarse whisper, "We shall speedily meet again:"—then rushing past Mabel he quitted the room, and soon afterwards the house.

"Your coming was most fortunate," said Lady Saxon-dale, endeavouring to make the incident itself available for the use of language to propitiate the woman. "I do most sincerely thank you."

"Thank me, indeed, I there's nothing to thank me for," cried Mabel. "I didn't come for that: how did I know what was going on? And really," she added, with a sneer, "your ladyship seems to be very unfortunate just at present: everybody is persecuting you with love overtures. First poor De-veril, who has been killed: secondly, this Staunton, who killed him! It's really a strange coincidence. But it wasn't for that I came: 'twas to tell you that things are getting every day worse and worse with me. The

conduct of the servants is unbearable."

"What has happened now, Mabel?" asked Lady Saxondale.

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"In what way, Mabel? in what way?" asked Lady Saxondale, gradually becoming deeply grave and ominously reflective.

"Oh! I will soon tell you what I mean," rejoined the housekeeper insolently. "I will have you summon the whole of the servants up into this room within the hour that's passing—yes, this night I mean—and you will tell them all that you insist upon their obeying me just as they do yourself. Now, that's what I will have done without any more delay."

"Well, Mabel, whatever you desire shall be done," answered Lady Saxondale in a deeper and more subdued tone than she was wont to adopt. "But allow me to suggest that it will be more dignified on your part if you appear quite cool and collected in the presence of the assembled servants."

"Oh! then you don't object to what I propose?" said the housekeeper, considerably mollified by Lady Saxondale's conciliatory words. "All I want is to be put on a proper footing—"

"And so you shall be, Mabel," at once replied her Ladyship. "I do indeed perceive now that your authority is not sufficiently established. I will call all the servants together, and give them such instructions as shall satisfy for the future. But when I think it," she added, glancing towards timepiece on the mantel, "it is what late to take such an important night. It is half-past eleven. The servants may already be in bed up earliest in the house. Do what you wish for breakfast? That is the settling domestic

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pletely appeased, "I think it would be better to wait till the morning."

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"In order to give greater effect to the proceeding, it shall appear as if you had really been making serious complaints to me; and I will read the whole of the servants such a humiliating lecture in your presence, that they shall never dare dispute your authority again."

"I was always sure that you would not see your faithful servant ill-treated," rejoined Mabel, who began to feel all the love of former days receive towards her mistress. "I shall now sleep comfortably to-night—which I have not done for a very long time. Good night, my lady—God bless your ladyship!"

"Good night, Mabel—I hope you will sleep comfortably."

The housekeeper left the room: and as the door closed behind her, a gloomy look gradually settled upon the countenance of Lady Saxondale—a look as ominous in its expression as that which she wore on the last occasion of her quarrel with Mabel, and which was related in a recent chapter.

It was midnight when the carriage returned with Juliana and Constance, who had been to a party. They came home very much fatigued, and at once retired to their own apartments. Edmund did not make his appearance; for since his intimacy with Emily Archer he seldom slept at Sixondale House, but was plunging headlong into dissipations and extravagances of every kind.

Soon after her daughters' return, Lady Saxondale repaired to her own chamber; and by one o'clock silence prevailed throughout the mansion.

In the morning some surprise was experienced by the domestics when the clock struck nine and Mabel had not made her appearance in the servants' hall. In consequence of her restless spirit and her ever-recurring anxiety to assert her authority, she invariably rose at a much earlier hour, and was wont to be down by at least seven o'clock, finding fault with everything, quarrelling with everybody—being contented with no one, and discovering naught to her satisfaction. It was therefore a relief to the servants generally that she was so late on the present occasion. Her lateness however naturally engendered surprise, for the reasons explained.

Half-past nine—then ten o'clock—and still no Mabel. Surprise increased to alarm, and it was thought right to let Lady Saxondale know that Mabel had not yet come downstairs.

Her ladyship was seated at breakfast with her two daughters when this intelligence was conveyed to her. It was Mary-Anne, the handsome maid, who brought in the announcement; and Lady Saxondale bade her go upstairs and knock at the Mabel's door,—adding, “Perhaps the poor creature is ill.”

The lady's-maid did not dare disobey this command: and perhaps she, of all the female servants of the household, stood less in awe of Mabel—her confidential position with her young mistresses giving her a certain stability in her place not enjoyed by the others. She accordingly proceeded to Mabel's chamber: but in a few minutes she came hurrying back into the breakfast-parlour, with a countenance pale as death and her looks expressive of terror and dismay.

“What, in heaven's name, is the matter?” asked Lady Saxondale.

“Mabel—Mabel is dead!” replied Mary-Anne, now recovering the faculty of speech, which in her horror she had temporarily lost.

“Dead!” echoed Lady Saxondale, starting from her seat. “Poor Mabel dead! With all her faults she was an attached and faithful servant.”

Thus speaking, her ladyship hurried from the room, followed by her daughters and Mary-Anne; and speeding up to the housekeeper's chamber, they saw at a first glance enough to confirm the maid's statement. Yes—Mabel was dead. Rigid, cold, and white, she lay stretched on her couch! Lady Saxondale placed her hand upon the face of the corpse, and immediately said, “It is like ice! She had been dead for many hours. Poor creature! it must have been apoplexy.”

The intelligence soon spread throughout the mansion that Mabel had died in the night: but we must candidly inform the reader that no particular grief was testified by any of the domestics. Lady Saxondale however appeared much distressed by the occurrence; and Constance likewise shed tears.

As for Juliana, she neither experienced any sorrow nor chose to show it.

In the course of the day an inquest was held upon the body. The medical men declared it to be a case

of apoplexy; and a verdict of “Died by the visitation of God,” was accordingly returned. For there was not the slightest sign or evidence to indicate that Mabel had committed suicide; and as for foul play, who could possibly have dreamt of such a thing within the aristocratic walls of Saxondale House?

CHAPTER XLII.

THE BILLET.

WE must now return to Henrietta Leyden. Three days had elapsed since that memorable night on which her attempted escape in company with the strange haggard figure in the loose dressing-gown, had been so suddenly frustrated. During this interval she had seen nothing more of Lord Everton, and therefore concluded that he had either been called away elsewhere by business, or that he was allowing her time to recover from the effects of that scene of excitement ere he renewed his persecutions. She still continued to occupy the same suite of apartments, Susan the servant-woman attending upon her as heretofore. She saw nothing of Mrs. Martin, and her existence during those three days was thus unvaried by a single occurrence worthy of note.

That there was a secret door opening through the wall into her bed-chamber, had been made aware by the incidents of the night just alluded to: but so admirably was this door fitted into its setting, that it was no wonder if it had all along escaped her notice until that occasion when its existence was revealed to her. She remembered sufficient of its whereabouts to search for it on the following morning; and she then discovered how skilfully it was contrived so as to defy detection when shut. The paper of the room was of a pattern having large squares to represent the wood-work of wainscoting, and was likewise of an oaken colour and well varnished. It was marked with lines to represent the frame-work of panelings; and the secret door was so artfully managed that it formed as it were two of the squares (one above the other) of the paper pattern. The numerous lines, both perpendicular and transvers, which tinted the paper, concealed the traces of the door's configuration, and absorbed as it were all

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"And so you shall be, Mabel," at once replied her Ladyship. "I do indeed perceive now that your authority is not sufficiently established. I will call all the servants together, and give them such instructions as shall satisfy you for the future. But when I think of it," she added, glancing towards the timepiece on the mantel, "it is somewhat late to take such an important step to-night. It is half-past eleven. Some of the servants may already be in bed—those who get up earliest in the morning. Suppose I do what you wish immediately after breakfast? That is the better time for settling domestic matters."

"Well, since your ladyship takes such a just and proper view of the matter," observed Mabel, now com-

pletely appeased, "I think it would be better to wait till the morning."

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marks of its existence. As a matter of course the door fitted with the utmost accuracy and tightness; and altogether it was so well concealed that it was no wonder if it had escaped Henrietta's notice when in the first instance she had searched her chamber to ascertain if there were any secret means of gaining admission thereto. But now that she had been made aware of the existence of that door, and knew whereto look for it, she could just distinguish its outline on the paper. On each of the three nights which had elapsed since the memorable one of her frustrated attempt to escape, she had not occupied the bed-chamber, but had slept upon the sofa in the drawing room, carefully locking the doors of communication. The reader may be assured that she had over and over again examined the walls of this apartment to assure herself against the existence of any other secret door; and having now the experience of the former discovery to guide her, she was better able to come to a positive conclusion on the point. So far, therefore, as it was possible to judge from all she knew, and from the most scrutinizing survey frequently reiterated, she felt confident that in respect to a secret means of communication with the drawing-room she was safe enough.

Need we pause to say how profound was the unhappiness of the young maiden at this prolonged captivity, or what torturing reflections she experienced when fixing her thoughts upon home? Her position appeared to be entirely hopeless; the place of her imprisonment was as well secured as any gaol could possibly be; and moreover she had learnt enough to make her aware that its ostensible purpose was that of a lunatic-asylum. She knew full well therefore that if she exhausted herself in shrieks, and screams, and cries for succour, all would be unavailing. What, then, was to become of her? Must she indeed resign herself to the horrible conviction that Lord Everton would triumph at last, and that she could never hope to go forth from those walls except dishonoured and undone?

Truly, the young maiden had sufficient topics for her thoughts, not only in immediate connexion with herself but, likewise in respect to the mysterious adventure of that memorable night. Who could the individual be that had come to her rescue, and had endeavoured to accomplish her escape and his own? Was he indeed some unfortunate lunatic confined

within those walls? or was there some deeper and darker mystery attached to it? Was he still alive? had he been merely stunned by the blow with which Bellamy had struck him down? or was he killed upon the spot? All these things were beyond the power of conjecture to solve. Certain it was that since that memorable night, Henrietta had heard neither cry nor lamentation to indicate his existence; for that those lamentations and that wild thrilling cry which she had heard on the same night that was so eventful to her, had come from his lips, she would not doubt. But then it was possible that if he still lived he had sunk into a state of quiescence again, or had been removed to some other part of the house whence his lamentations could not reach her.

That he must really be a lunatic she was more than half inclined to believe: for that he had visited her room by means of the private door on those occasions when his presence so much frightened her, was beyond all doubt—but wherefore had he not addressed her at the time of these visits? Wherefore steal into her chamber thus, merely to terrify her as it would seem, and then fly away again? This appeared to be the conduct of one whose reason was indeed unhinged; and therefore, as above stated, she was inclined to adopt the belief that he was really a lunatic.

Hopeless as the poor girl's condition seemed, she nevertheless revolved in her brain a variety of projects for the accomplishment of her escape. Such is over the case with persons in captivity although the circumstances of their incarceration may seem to preclude the possibility of success. Oh! if she could escape and return to her mother and little Charley—how happy would she be! yes: but when she looked at those bars her heart sank within her. And yet she went on revolving plan after plan, until she would fall into moods of such fanciful dreaminess that when starting up from these reveries, she was stricken with the dread that her brain was turning and that her reason was becoming affected.

It was on the morning of the fourth day after the night of memorable incidents, that Henrietta arose from her sofa-couch at a very early hour, and proceeded to put into execution something that she had finally resolved

upon. It was but a little after five, and the profoundest silence reigned throughout and around the house. The fields were not as yet cheered with the beams of the sun; but they appeared of an emerald brightness in their own natural freshness and with the dew upon them. The reader will recollect that the garden stretched down to a shrubbery standing upon the bank of the New River, and that on the other side of the stream the meadows of the picturesque landscape stretched onward. From her window Henrietta had often seen persons on the opposite bank some occasionally riding on horseback through the field—and others remaining there to fish. These circumstances had inspired her with the idea which she was now about to put into execution.

She had books in the room, but no writing materials: not so much as a pencil had she at her command—much less pens and ink. But she had already devised a substitute. Scraping some soot from the lower part of the chimney in one of the fire-places, she mixed it with a little water in a tumbler, and thus managed to form an ink which would at all events answer her purpose. From one of the books she tore out a blank leaf; and with a pen-knife which she found in a dressing-case upon the toilet-table, she contrived to fashion a rude but serviceable pen out of a lucifer-match. She then sat down and wrote the following lines:—

"Into whomsoever's hands this may fall, it is earnestly requested that immediate information may be given to the Police-authorities that a young female, named Henrietta Leyden has been forcibly carried off and detained against her will in the house kept by a Mr. Bellamy and generally supposed to be a lunatic asylum. Even if it does really serve such a purpose, it is likewise made available for the perpetration of wrongs, and villanies which require exposure. Let it not be thought that this is the effusion of a maniac. For heaven's sake let not this appeal be disregarded! Whatever be the result, the person finding the billet will at least perform a humane and benevolent act by placing it in the hands of the authorities. Oh, let not this earnest entreaty be disregarded!"

Such were the lines which Henrietta penned by means of her ingeniously-contrived writing materials; and she managed to make the note even more

legible than she had at first dared hope or than the agitated state of her feelings seemed to promise.

But now, in that manner was the billet to be conveyed out of the house? Her plan was already settled, even to its minutest details. Her corset afforded some pieces of whalebone, wherewith she promptly formed a bow and an arrow. Having materials for needlework in the room she was not at a loss for thread wherewith to string her bow. Thus far her task was completed: and opening the window gently, she anxiously waited until some person should appear on the opposite bank of the river. During the interval she measured the distance with her eye—calculated the strength of the bow—and felt assured that it would shoot the arrow to the requisite distance. We need hardly state that the billet she had written was fastened to the end of the arrow.

She did not tarry long in suspense, for to her joy she presently beheld a person mounted upon a dark chesnut steed, riding along the river's bank. She waved her white handkerchief in the hope of attracting the rider's attention; and to her joy she succeeded—for the person reined in his steed, stopped, and gazed towards the house. Then Henrietta discharged the arrow from the bow: and to her still greater joy she beheld it clear the shrubbery and the river and fall into the field but a few yards from where the horseman stood. The next instant that individual sprang from the steed—picked up the arrow—and read the billet. A white handkerchief was waved as a signal that its contents would be complied with: or at least Henrietta hoped that such was the meaning of the sign. The horseman sprang upon his steed again—cantered along the river's bank—and was soon out of sight.

Henrietta closed the window and burst into tears of joy: for she felt assured that her deliverance would now be accomplished. Oh! wherefore had she not thought of this plan before? It now appeared so simple—so natural—that she was astonished at herself for not having previously adopted it. But better late than never; and clasping her hands in the fervour of rapturous hope, she murmured, "Ah, my dear mother! ere many hours shall have elapsed, you will learn that your daughter did not wilfully fly away to abandon you,

And dear Charley too—Oh, how rejoiced shall I be to strain him in my arms once more! But heavens! if this long absence, so utterly unaccountable to my poor dear mother, should have killed her, ill and enfeebled as she was!

The recurrence of this dreadful thought—a thought which over and over again from the first moment of her captivity had haunted the poor girl—suddenly threw a damp upon the joyousness of hope which a few moments back had filled her soul; and now the tears gushed forth again—but this time they were tears of bitterness!

At the usual hour Susan brought in the breakfast; and towards midday, Mrs. Martin made her appearance. Henrietta had not seen her since the occurrences of that memorable night so often alluded to; and the flesh crept with a shuddering chill upon her bones, as she found that detested woman again in her presence. It appeared to be ominous of evil; and the young damsel's heart sank within her.

"I dare say you were surprised" said Mrs. Martin, "that I did not come near you: but I thought it better to leave you altogether by yourself for a few days, so that you might have leisure to reflect upon the folly and uslessness of refusing his lordship's overtures. Do I find you in a more pliant mood now?"

"No—ten thousand times no!" answered Henrietta with hysterical vehemence.

"Don't put yourself into a passion," said Mrs. Martin. "You have really no hope except in submission; and you are only quarrelling with your own good fortune by this perverse obstinacy. Perhaps you think that the miserable lunatic who, by finding a means of getting stealthily out of his own chamber came to your assistance the other night, will prove your champion again? But we have taken precautions against the possibility of such an event. He is in a more secure place now, I can assure you!"

"Then he is not dead? he was not murdered by that brutal blow!" said Henrietta anxiously; for she knew not precisely what was the meaning to be attached to the woman's words.

"Dead—no!" cried Mrs. Martin. "Though Mr. Bellamy struck hard, he did not kill: and besides, that miserable wretch seems to have as many lives as a cat."

"Who is he? what is he?" asked Henrietta, shuddering at the ideas of the ill-reputant which the poor unfortunate creature most probably received in that house, and to which the woman's illusion appeared to point.

"Who is he?" said Mrs. Martin: "why, what else could he be but a wretched madman—one however of the cunningest description I can tell you! These were his cries you heard and that you talked to me about in the garden—only it did not suit me so well communicative then, but since you have seen the man, there is no necessity to observe any particular mystery with regard to him. However, I did not come to you now to talk on that subject, but to tell you that Lord Everton will be here this evening—and he has intimated his pleasure to sup with you. He hopes that you will receive him in a proper manner. He has suffered much from the blow which the miserable lunatic dealt him the other night; but that is not the only reason why he has abstained from visiting you for three or four days past. He hoped that during this interval you would see the necessity of securing your own happiness and accepting his proposals. What am I to tell him?"

"Tell him?" ejaculated Henrietta, the colour mounting to her pale cheeks; "that until the very death will I resist him! And now let not another word pass between us; for your presence is abhorrent and revolting to me."

"Oh! if this is still your mood," exclaimed Mrs. Martin, tossing her head with mingled rage and contempt, "the sooner you are reduced to submission the better."

With these words she quitted the room locking the door as usual behind her.

"Oh, wherefore does nobody come?" murmured Henrietta to herself, as the clock of Hornsey church at this instant proclaimed the hour of noon. "Surely there has been time for that gentleman to fulfil the request contained in my letter, if he meant to do it at all. But, abus! he may have reasoned that it was the effusion of a lunatic; or even if he did take it to the authorities, they may have put that construction upon it. Yes—it must be so! Idiot that I was to indulge in such wild hopes! Heavens! it is almost a proof that I am in reality becoming insane!"

Hour after hour passed, and not the slightest indication presented itself to

show that Henrietta's billet had produced any effect. Gradually her spirits sank altogether; and she bade farewell to hope. Yes: but still she did not resign herself to the idea of succumbing to the wishes of Lord Everton: there was still one alternative—the last resource of despair—namely, death!

The evening came—the sun went down—the haze of dusk stole over the landscape—and the obscurity deepened into gloom. Susan made her appearance with the candles—drew the curtains—and began to lay a cloth in the dining room for supper. Henrietta observed that she need not give herself the trouble to do this,—adding, “You know that I never take anything in the evening.”

This she said in order to ascertain whether it was really Lord Everton's intention to force himself upon her; and when Susan answered calmly, “His lordship is going to sup with you Miss,”—the young damsel felt as if the crisis of her fate were indeed approaching.

An idea struck her. She could do as she did once before—lock herself in another apartment. But Susan, evidently anticipating her design, hastened to the door of the drawing-room—took out the key—and secured it about her person. Henrietta saw that her enemies were determined; and she felt herself weighed down by a wretchedness so utter—a despair so profound—that the instant Susan left the room, she seized a knife from the supper-table with the intent of plunging it into her heart. But the images of her mother and little Charles suddenly appeared to rise up before her; and flinging the knife back upon the table she murmured, “No—not now—not now. That must be the last resource of all!”

Presently Susan returned, followed by the footman, and both of them bearing numerous dishes containing the materials for a succulent repast. They likewise covered the side-board with fruit and wines; and when all this was done, Lord Everton, extravagantly dressed in the evening costume of an old *beau*, made his appearance. At a sign which he gave, the servants withdrew; and Henrietta found herself again alone with her persecutor.

“I hope,” he said, “that you will spare me the necessity of arguments, threats, or entreaties. You must feel

that you are completely at my mercy—you would do well to make a merit of your position—and if you agree to render me happy, there are no bounties which my hand can bestow which shall not be showered upon you.”

But Henrietta gave no reply: she remained sitting in one corner of the room, with her looks bent down; for the sight of that old nobleman—as old in iniquity as he was in years—was indescribably loathsome to her.

“Is it possible, Henrietta,” he continued, “that you can be so foolish? I cannot attribute it to mere virtue on your part: for I am terribly sceptical of the existence of such virtue at all in any female—especially where there is so much to gain by the sacrifice of the slimy, shadow. I therefore suppose that you are indignant at having been carried off—disappointed at not having been able to escape the other night—spirit-broken by the monotonous existence you have led? Well, I must endeavour to cheer you. See here, my dear girl—look at these bright things—which, if your eyes can reflect their lustre, will make them doubly bright also. And here,” he continued, “is a proof of my liberality. See what happiness you may now ensure to your mother and your little brother, of whom you spoke to me the other day.”

While thus addressing her, Lord Everton displayed first of all a casket containing a set of diamonds, a superb gold watch with an exquisitely worked chain, several rings, and other jewels—the whole not having cost less than many hundreds of pounds: and in the second place he produced a small pocket-book which he opened, showing that its contents were a large roll of bank-notes.

Henrietta threw one languid glance towards the objects of temptation which he thus displayed; but it was an involuntary glance—one dictated by a transient and feeble curiosity, and followed by no result in his favour. On the contrary, her looks were instantaneously cast downward again; and she sat silent and motionless, the prey to a deep and absorbing sorrow.”

“This is childish to a degree!” said Lord Everton petulantly, “Do you think that after all the trouble I have taken I mean to let you slip through my fingers? If so, you are very much in error. I have spoken fairly to you—I have just now proved that I can be bounteous and liberal: will you force me to use threats? Because, remember

that threats will be followed by their execution, and will not be uttered in vain. Now listen—since to threats it is evident that you mean to impel me. Here is a little phial,—and he produced one from his waistcoat-pocket,—“containing a powerful narcotic, but of a perfectly harmless character in other respects. It is now ten o’clock. I mean to remain patiently and quietly until eleven, partaking of my supper and enjoying my wine, whether you chose to join me or not. But if at eleven o’clock you have not thought better of your obstinacy and perverseness, I shall pour a few drops of this fluid into a glass, and fill it up with wine. Then, in spite of your resistance—in spite of your cries—in spite of your entreaties—my servants will pour the contents of that glass down your throat. Now, Henrietta Loyden, you understand me. You know what the effect will be! Insensibility! And then—But I need say no more. One hour have you for reflection.”

Still the young maiden answered not: she appeared to have sunk into a stupor or apathy more profound than even despair.

Lord Everton seated himself at table and partook of the delicacies served up. He then rang the bell; and the servants who answered the summons removed the dishes and placed the fruit and wine on the board.

“The next time I ring,” he said, addressing himself to Susan and the footman, “both of you will answer the summons; and let Mr. Bellamy and Mrs. Martin accompany you:”—then as the door closed behind them, he turned to Henrietta, saying, “You perceive that I am in earnest.”

Still she gave no reply. But stupefied or apathetic as she might seem, she was not really so. Her thoughts were now terribly vivid within her. She had heard Lord Everton’s diabolical threat in respect to the narcotic—she had heard likewise the order he had just given the domestics—and she did not require to be told that he was quite capable of putting his menace into execution. On the contrary, she knew full well that he would do so; and now therefore it appeared as if there were no alternative for the poor young damsel but to make up her mind to die. She saw that there were knives upon the board and she resolved that one of them should presently drink her heart’s blood. Still she lingered and lingered,

painfully feeling how the time was passing away, and yet not daring to execute her fatal purpose. Oh! in the depth of her soul how sad, how sad was the farewell which she took of her parent and her little brother,—saying to herself, “I shall never see you again, but may heaven prove kinder towards ye both than it has been to me! Unless indeed in its mercy it has already taken you, my poor mother, unto itself!”

The tears trickled down her cheeks—she clasped her hands convulsively—and her sobs reached the ears of the pitiless old nobleman, who was seated at the table luxuriating in delicious fruits and choice wines.

“Perhaps you have come to a resolve?” he said, bending his eyes upon her.

“Yes, yes—a resolve—my mind is made up!” she exclaimed, rising from her seat and advancing towards the table.

Everton’s first thought was that she was about to signify her submission; but there was something in her looks which startled and troubled him—even for an instant filling him with dismay; for her gaze was so wild—her face so ghastly white—her excitement so terrible.

“Henrietta,” he said, rising also from his chair, “what am I to understand? what mean you?”

“My lord, once for all,” she asked, “is your purpose settled?”

“Yes: have I not said it? But your’s—”

“Is settled also,” she rejoined quickly: “and that is to die!”

Then with incredible promptitude she caught up a fruit-knife from the table, and was in the very act of dealing a blow at her heart, when Lord Everton, with an alacrity and also a strength of which his enfeebled frame seemed incapable, seized her arm and wrenched the weapon from her hand—but not without receiving a ghastly wound across his fingers in so doing.

“Wretched girl!” he cried, “what would you do? But this shall not save you!”—and catching her round the waist, he impelled her towards the bell, which he rang violently.

Half-fainting—utterly overcome—and with a dizziness in her brain, Henrietta sank upon the floor; and in a few moments those individuals whom Lord Everton had ordered to be in attendance, hastened into the room.

CHAPTER XLIII.

LADY BESS'S ENTERPRISE.

IT was close upon nine o'clock on the same evening of which we are writing, that Lady-Bess, habited in her male apparel, dismounted from her gallant chestnut steed at the door of Solomon Patch's house in Agar Town. The potboy ran out to hold the horse; and the amazonian lady entered the boozing-ken. At the bar she inquired if Chiffin the Cannibal were in the house; but Solomon, without giving her a verbal reply to the question, made a significant sign, and beckoned Lady Bess to follow him. Several persons were either drinking or having their jugs filled at the bar; and she therefore supposed that Solomon did not choose to speak in their presence. She accordingly accompanied the obsequious, fawning old man, up into that little room which was used for private purposes, and has before been mentioned.

"I suppose you know, my lady," observed Solomon, with a mysterious look the instant they were alone together, "that Chiffin is on the shy. The truth is, he's wanted on account of the business in Park Lane yonder—"

"What business?" inquired Lady Bess, "I have heard nothing about it. I have been down at Dover for some days past and only return to town yesterday. What has happened?"

"Why your ladyship must be informed," responded Patch, "that Chiffin and Tony Wilkins did a bit of a creak at Saxondale House—"

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed the amazon, with a smile which displayed her magnificent set of teeth: for the name recalled to her mind her freak with young Lord Saxondale on the road to Edmonton. "This is the first I have heard of it. But I *must* see Chiffin tonight—as well as Tony Wilkins and one or two others. It is imperative, Sol."

"Good my lady—very good. As for Tony Wilkins and two or three others," continued Patch, "your ladyship can either see them as you like—or I will within a few minutes send them any orders your ladyship may have to give: for though they're not very far off—not very far, my excellent lady."

"Well then," said Lady Bess, "let Tony and two others set off and meet me in the lane behind Hornsey church

between ten and eleven o'clock. Now I trust this to you, Sol—and you must not fail. But what about Chiffin? He is so absolutely necessary to me in the enterprise I have in hand, that I must see him. Where is he, I ask? Come—speak out."

"He's uncommon well concealed, my lady," responded Patch, with an obsequious but knowing grin. "The fact is, my lady, the detectives have been down here to look for him. It isn't often they trouble Agar Town with their presence; but they've done it on this occasion. You see, my lady, when a rich person is robbed, these fellers take more pains and run greater risks than in or'inary cases. But I expect, from a hint that Madge Somers let drop, that the affair is very likely to be made all comfortable, and Chiffin will be able to show again soon."

"Never mind what is hoped or expected," said Lady Bess, stamping her foot impatiently. "Tell me where I can see him."

"I will take your ladyship to him," answered Solomon. "May I respectfully and humbly request that your ladyship will have the kindness to go and wait at the foot of the nearest bridge for me? I will join you there in five minutes. The boy shall just put your horse into the stable while we are absent. It's not very far from here—and as it's now dark there's not so much risk."

"But do not fail to send word to Tony Wilkins and others," said Lady Bess. "And observe, Solomon, let each of the three have a brace of pistols. You understand me?"

Thus speaking, Lady Bess put a few gold pieces into the old landlord's hand; and with a most obsequious bow and fawning grimace, he said, "Your ladyship has a knack of making anybody understand—or at all events, of doing your bidding. The message shall be sent; and I'll be with your ladyship on the bridge in a few minutes.

The amazonian heroine thereupon descended the stairs; and issuing from the house, bade the potboy put up her horse till she returned but ordered him not to unsaddle the animal, as she had no time to waste. She then repaired to the bridge, and walked to and fro for about ten minutes, at the expiration of which time Solomon Patch emerged from the deepening gloom of the evening. He requested her to follow him; and

crossing the bridge they skirted the canal for a distance of about a couple of hundred yards,—at which point they reached a flight of steps leading down to the towing-path. These they descended, and proceeding along the path for a little way, they reached a coal-barge moored against it.

"Holloa!" said old Solomon, in a peculiar tone: and then he gave a short cough.

A man whom even through the gloom Lady Bess could perceive to be all begrimed with coal-dust, emerged from the hatchway of the cabin-part of the barge; and on recognising the old landlord, he said, "Well, what's brought you here?" At the same time he eyed Lady Bess askance through the obscurity of the evening.

"All right, Tugs," responded Solomon, stepping on board the barge.

Lady Bess followed, though she did not seem altogether to admire the dirty quarters to which she was thus being led; for, as the reader is well aware, she dressed in the most exquisite style and with what might be termed a little dandyism, as applied to her male costume. The grimy individual whose name appeared to be Tugs, descended the hatchway, followed by Solomon and Lady Bess; and our heroine now found herself in the close fetid atmosphere of a little cabin, where by the dim light of a candle a woman was seated suckling a baby. This was none other than Mrs. Tugs; and it was an infant specimen of the Tugs' family which she was nourishing at the maternal bosom.

Lady Bess expected to find the Cannibal here; but she was disappointed, and therefore began to wonder wherefore she had been conducted to such a place at all. But she was not kept long in suspense; for the bargeman proceeded to open a cupboard in the bulk-head, or wooden partition that enclosed the cabin transversely; and then he lifted the whole of this cupboard out bodily. The entire array of shelves being thus removed, left an aperture about two feet wide and four feet high. A light glimmered within; and the odour of tobacco-smoke saluted the nostrils.

"There he is," observed Solomon Patch to Lady Bess.

Our heroine accordingly entered the opening: and in a little nook about six feet square, she beheld Chiffin the Cannibal, sitting on an inverted tub

and puffing his pipe with a grim and sullen look.

"Well, what is it now?" he asked in a savage growling tone. "I suppose you've come, Lady Bess, to blow me up for running away and leaving you that night in the lurch—when we stopped the earring, I mean. But, by Satan! I thought you was dead—or else I would have stuck by you to the last."

"And how did you know that I recovered?" asked Lady Bess.

"'Cos why I saw Israel Patch from Gravisend up at Solomon's t'other day, and he told me as how you had rode down to Dover and thrown the rascals overboard. It was a deuced clever thing—and if I was in the humour I wouldn't mind saying summat more handsome still about it."

"Never mind compliments: Chiffin," rejoined Lady Bess, with a smile: "I know they are things not much in your way. But how long do you mean to remain cooped up in this den? where—excuse me laughing— you look just for all the world like a bear in his cage at the Zoological Gardens."

"Ah! it's all deuced fine to make a jest of it," growled Chiffin, more savagely still: "But blow me if I like it. The detectives never were so sharp on a fellow before. Howsoever, if what old Madge says is true and she really does possess any influence in the affair, I expect it will be all right in a day or two."

"And if you saw your way clear to make a few grins to-night, wouldn't you risk the danger and leave this crib, which is enough to suffocate you?"

"'Pon my soul," answered Chiffin, taking the pipe from his mouth and puffing out an immense cloud of smoke, "I should be glad of almost any excuse to get out of such a cursed hole as this. But if one does risk one's safety it must be for some good reason or another; or else it's mere foolhardiness."

"Then I propose to furnish you with such an excuse," rejoined Lady Bess. "Come, pluck up your courage, Chiffin,—and you shall make a good thing of it to-night."

"'Oh! as for the courage, that's not wa' ting,' returned the Cannibal, in a somewhat more cheerful tone, and with an endeavour to put on a little more amiable look. "Besides, somehow or another I've took a fancy to do

things with you, Lady Bess—for you seem to have a deuced good run of luck. I used to be the boy for getting safe off: but this time things went wrong—and so I was obliged to come and play at hide-and-seek here with my friend Tugs the Blue-ruin Carrier."

Lady Bess now understood what the avocation of the barge-man was: for under the cloak of keeping an aquatic conveyance for coals, Mr. Tugs was in the habit of receiving on board his vessel the product of the numerous illicit stills worked in Agar Town. Hence his nick-name of the Blue-ruin Carrier—"blue-ruin" being the partner synonym for "gin."

"Come, Chiffin," said Lady Bess, "and prepare for action. You have a good walk before you. But it is now quite dark; and by following the pathway of the canal a little while, you may emerge safe at some convenient spot, whence you cross over to Hornsey church, where you must meet me at a quarter to eleven at the latest. It is an understanding?"

"If so be the object's worth going after," replied the Cannibal.

"I am not in the habit, generally speaking, of embarking in unprofitable enterprises," rejoined Lady Bess,—"that precious affair of the lawyers excepted."

"Well, it is an understanding then," said Chiffin; "and I will be at the place punctual. I've got my barkers in my pocket; and with my club in my fist, it won't be an easy thing for two or three, or even four detectives to take me."

Lady Bess now quitted the barge, accompanied by old Solomon Patch; and they retraced their way to the boozing-ken where the heroine had left her horse. The gallant animal was at once brought forth from the stable—the amazonian lady vaulted upon its back—and having ascertained from Solomon that he had duly sent her instructions to Tony Wilkins and two others of the gang, she made the best of her way from Agar Town.

At about half-past ten o'clock Lady Bess arrived on foot in the immediate vicinage of Hornsey church, which for the benefit of many of our readers, we should observe was not above a mile from her own cottage-residence. At the place of appointment she found Tony Wilkins and two others of the gang whose headquarters were in Agar Town. These two auxiliaries were respectively known as Mat the Cadger

and Spider Bill—the latter deriving the prefixed nickname from the circumstance of possessing very long legs which were excessively thin and resembling in shape those of the particular insect alluded to. A few minutes after Lady Bess made her appearance, the little party was joined by Chiffin the Cannibal, who seemed in a somewhat better humour than was his wont: for the fresh air and the prospect of "business" cheered his spirits after having been cooped up in the close and fetid atmosphere of the barge-cabin.

Lady Bess now hastily but distinctly described the exact position of the house which was to be the scene of operations; and the little party all separating, each individual bent his way singly in the direction named. In a few minutes they were re-united in front of a house which stood a little back from the lane in which it was situated, and was embowered in the shade of large and wide-spreading trees. The gate was locked: but over this insignificant barrier the invaders promptly clambered. Scarcely had they thus set foot in the grounds, when a large dog sprang towards them: but Chiffin at once knocked him down with one blow of his club, and with a second despatched him. Lady Bess and her followers then advanced up to the front door, at which the heroine knocked imperiously; while the four men stood a little aside, so as not to be immediately observed by the person answering the summons.

In about a minute the door was opened by a female servant; and Lady Bess, glancing rapidly around the hall, beheld no other person nigh.

"Now, don't be frightened, my good woman," she said, crossing the threshold: "for no harm will happen if you remain quiet: but if you cry out you must take the consequences."

While thus speaking, Lady Bess produced a pistol, merely to show that she was armed, but did not point it in a threatening way at the woman. The female was nevertheless profoundly frightened; and being overpowered by her terror as much as coerced by the intimation given her, she held her peace. The four ruffians now made their appearance: and the whole party passing into the hall, closed the front door behind them.

"Now, my good woman," said Lady Bess, "you remain bere with one of my men, while I examine the premises

with the others. Tony Wilkins, to your charge I entrust her."

The terrified woman sank down upon one of the hall-chairs, still speechless with terror: and Tony Wilkins, armed with a brace of pistols, posted himself by her side. Chiffin, Mat the Cadger, and Spider Bill also produced their pistols; and led by Lady Bess, they at once entered the rooms opening from the hall. Therein they discovered no one: they accordingly descended to the kitchen-premises, where they found the gardener and the cook quietly eating their supper and perfectly unconscious of what had taken place in the hall. They were however terribly frightened at the sudden incursion of this armed band: but their fears somewhat subsided on receiving from Lady Bess the assurance that they should not be ill-treated if they kept quiet. They naturally gazed with surprise upon this amazonian leader of the ruffian-band: for at a second glance they have not failed to discern her sex. They were marched up into the hall, where they were consigned, along with the other female-servant, to the custody of Tony Wilkins.

Lady Bess and her three followers next ascended the staircase—examined all the rooms on the first floor—but found no one there. They proceeded to mount the second flight; and on reaching the landing they heard voices speaking, and sounds as if a struggle were going on, within a room the door of which stood ajar.

Into this room they at once burst, Lady Bess leading the way: and there the following scene met their view. A young girl upon her knees, with dishevelled hair and anguish-stricken countenance, was imploring mercy at the hands of five persons who surrounded her. This young girl was, as the reader has no doubt already suspected, Henrietta Leyden; and the others, whose forbearance she was imploring, were Lord Everton, Mark Bellamy, the footman, Mrs. Martin, and Susan. Mrs. Martin held in her hand a wine-glass the contents of which she was ordering Henrietta to drink; while Bellamy and were at the moment laying violent upon her in order to compel her to the draught.

The sudden invasion of Lady Bess and her party, the whole aspect of the room changed in an instant. Susan dropped the wine-glass and shrieked—Henrietta

sprang to her feet—Lord Everton looked astounded—the footman knew not how to act—and Bellamy was the only one who had courage or presence of mind enough to accost the intruders at once and demand their business.

"You see that any attempt at resistance is useless," replied Lady Bess, playing with a pistol in such a manner and to indicate that she knew how to use it: while Chiffin on her right hand showed by his murderous-looking countenance that he was not a man to be trifled with.

As for Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill, they seemed very suitable companions indeed for such a person as the Cannibal; and when it is remembered that they were all well armed, the reader cannot be surprised if nothing in the shape of resistance was ever attempted.

"But what do you want? what is your object?" demanded Bellamy.

"In the first place, to rescue this young woman," responded Lady Bess.

"Oh, I thought that you were the same!" cried Henrietta, in the enthusiasm of joy; and she at once bounded forward towards the heroine—for she had no room in her soul at the instant for dismay or misgiving at the sinister looking aspect of her companions.

"Yes—you have nothing to fear, poor girl!" at once responded Lady Bess. "It is in consequence of your note that I am here to deliver you. Stand back for a moment, while I transact a little business with these people."

Henrietta, full of mingled joy and amazement,—joy at this unlooked-for deliverance, and amazement at perceiving her deliverer to be a woman in male apparel,—glided hastily behind the heroine and her band.

"Now secure these men," said Lady Bess to her followers; "and if they dare offer resistance you will know how to act."

The order was speedily obeyed,—even Chiffin acting as a mere subaltern on the occasion, and by his conduct acknowledging the ascendancy of Lady Bess. Lord Everton, the footman, and Bellamy, were compelled to submit to the process of binding by means of the cords which the spacious pockets of the intruders furnished; while Susan, retreating into a corner of the room, gave vent to her terror in piteous lamentations—and Mrs. Martin stood

silently watching the proceedings, but with a countenance that bespoke profound dismay.

"You will not harm them?" said Henrietta, addressing herself in a tone of entreaty to Lady Bess. "Cruelly as I have been used, I seek not for revenge."

"My dear girl," responded the amazonian lady curtly, "you must leave us to manage after our own fashion. It is sufficient for you that these people are no longer capable of injuring you, and that you shall be presently free to go where you will. Are there any other females in this house under circumstances similar to your own?"

"I cannot say," responded Henrietta: "but I am inclined to think not. There is however one individual in whom I am interested—a prisoner under mysterious circumstances—"

"Enough! he shall be delivered also," cried Lady Bess.

"No—you dare not perpetrate such a foul wrong," exclaimed Lord Everton, in mingled rage and terror, as he literally writhed in the chair to which he had been bound,—Bellamy and the footman having undergone a similar process.

"Who is this old reprobate?" asked Lady Bess, turning towards Henrietta. "Is he the person named Bellamy?"

"Answer no questions, my good girl," cried Lord Everton, in a voice of the most abject entreaty; "I implore that you will not!"

"Yes—but she will," was the cool response given by Lady Bess: "for she will obey the directions of her deliverers."

Henrietta had certainly no reason for showing any favour towards the old nobleman, nor indeed any one of the individuals who had been concerned in persecuting her; and she accordingly named them all one after the other.

"Oh! then the suspicions excited by your note and the result of the little inquiries which I myself have caused to be privately made during the day are fully confirmed. This then," continued Lady Bess, "is nothing more than one of those mansions of convenience which under some plausible disguise serve the infamous purpose of an aristocratic voluptuary. Ah! what pretty things have we here?"—and she advanced towards the sofa where the jewel-casket which Lord Everton had intended as a temptation to Henrietta,

way lying open. "And here is a pocket-book too, with bank-notes in it. Come, you shall take charge of these little matters," she added, turning towards Chiffin, whose eyes glistened at the sight of the diamonds.

Henrietta now looked aghast, and a faint shriek escaped her lips; for all in an instant was she made aware that her deliverers, instead of being impelled by the most disinterested purpose in respect to herself alone, entertained predatory views as well.

"A thousand pounds—that's what this here book contains," said Chiffin, who had hastily glanced over the roll of bank-notes.

"My dear girl," said Lady Bess, turning towards Henrietta, "you really must not attempt to interfere with our proceedings. We mean to reward ourselves for the trouble taken on your account."

"And considering all things," added Chiffin, glancing towards the prisoner, "they won't dare to make a piece of work about it. So there's no need to cut any throats or blow any brains out. But we may as well get as much as we can out of 'em."

Thus speaking, he made a sign to Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill; whereupon they all three proceeded to rifle the persons of Lord Everton and Mr. Bellamy, despoiling them of their watches, their rings, and their purses: but they took no notice of the footman, nor of Mrs. Martin and Susan. Henrietta surveyed these proceedings with the most painful sensations: but she dared not give utterance to a word of remonstrance.

"Now, about this other individual whom you wish to have rescued?" said Lady Bess, once more turning to Henrietta.

"You will have to search for him. I know not in which part of the house he is confined."

"We will soon discover that," responded the heroine. "But you would do well to put on such clothing as you may intend to go forth with, as we shall soon take our departure."

Henrietta hurried to the door of the drawing-room which she had to pass through to reach the bed-chamber: but that door was locked—for Susan, be it remembered, had taken away the key. This circumstance Henrietta at once named; and Susan produced the key from her pocket. The young damsel then took up one of the lights and proceeded to the bed-chamber.

The instant she had quitted the room, Lord Everton said to Lady Bess, "Whoever you are, I beg that you will give me your attention for a few moments—in private, I mean—or else aside—"

"Speak out," cried the heroine: "there need be no secrets from my companions."

"In the first place be so good as to tell me" said Lord Everton, "under what circumstances you came hither."

"They were ingenious enough," was the reply, delivered with a smile. "A whale-bone arrow, shot from one of the back windows of the house, conveyed to me a note as I was riding on the river's bank; and the note gave me the intimation that there was a forlorn damsel to be rescued within the walls of this terrible fortress, whereof you Lord Everton, appear to be the ogre: for assuredly you are not a giant either in courage or size. And now, what more have you to say? for it is ridiculous enough that you should play the part of a questioner and I that of the questioned."

"Are you not satisfied with what you have done?" asked the nobleman, who was evidently a prey to the direst apprehensions. "You cannot think of giving his release to a wretched lunatic for such indeed is the individual to whom this girl Henrietta refers—"

"A lunatic?" echoed Lady Bess. "From all I have heard and seen I scarcely think that Lord Everton would in reality keep a private madhouse. No, my lord: I have fathomed the nature of this secluded mansion—"

"I can assure you," he promptly rejoined, "it is duly licensed as a lunatic asylum—it is not mine—I have nothing to do with it—my friend Mr. Bellamy keeps it."

"Then wherefore are you, my lord, so deeply interested in the safe custody of this alleged lunatic in whose behalf my aid has been evoked?" asked Lady Bess, with an incredulous smile.

At this instant Henrietta re-appeared, with her bonnet and shawl, ready for departure; and having caught the last words which had fallen from Lady Bess's lips, she at once comprehended that during her temporary absence some endeavour had been made by Lord Everton to prevent the rescue of the mysterious unknown with the pale sad face and the loose dressing-gown.

"Oh! do not be persuaded against a good deed," she exclaimed, in earnest

appeal to Lady Bess. "Whoever you are, and whatever you may be, I conjure you to accomplish this night's work thoroughly. The unfortunate being for whom I have appealed, is under some dread coercion here—a strange mystery surrounds him—"

"Ah! this becomes more and more interesting?" exclaimed Lady Bess. "But let us see the individual we are speaking of."

"One word in your ear!" cried Lord Everton, as if clutching nervously at some last resource. "Only one word, I beg—I entreat!"

Lady Bess accordingly approached the nobleman, and bent down her head to catch what he had to say; then turning away again after he had whispered a few hurried syllables in her ear, she exclaimed aloud, "Two thousand guineas—oh! not to interfere any further! The offer is a tempting one: but it strikes me that if it be worth so much for your lordship to pay to keep the alleged lunatic in custody, it must be worth double or treble the sum for us to set him free. We will do the latter."

"Mind what you are about," growled Chiffin in a low voice, as he drew Lady Bess aside for a moment. "Two thousand guineas isn't to be sneezed at."

"Leave me to manage," was Lady Bess's prompt but whispered answer. "From something I have heard strange suspicions are afloat in my mind: and I rather think that we may make this night's business worth many thousands of pounds to us."

"Well, you know best," said Chiffin, yielding to the ascendancy which this extraordinary woman appeared to assert and most assuredly to exercise over all those who acted in concert with her.

"Now, Miss Leyden," she exclaimed "we will pursue our researches. You two," she added, speaking to Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill, "will remain here for a few minutes to mount guard over the prisoners and see that these women do not leave the room."

"One word more!" cried Lord Everton: "only one word—one last word—I beseech you!"

"Not a word—not a syllable," exclaimed Lady Bess: and as she passed out of the room, followed by Chiffin and Henrietta, the wretched old nobleman gave vent to a cry expressive of feelings wrought up to an excruciating agony—while Bellamy muttered deep but bitter imprecations, and Mrs. Martin

shivered from head to foot with mingled rage and terror. Nor were the footman and Susan unconcerned: but probably they had less reason to be so deeply agitated as the rest.

Meanwhile Lady Bess, Chiffin, and Henrietta had emerged upon the landing outside; and taking a lamp which was burning on a table there, they ascended to the higher storey, where Miss Leyden deemed it most probable they should find the object of their search. They reached a passage which appeared to run the whole width of the building with an array of doors on either side. First of all, in pursuance of Henrietta's suggestion, they endeavoured to enter a room which as nearly as she could calculate was immediately above the suit of apartments she had occupied in the house; for she fancied that from thence must have descended the lamentations and that thrilling cry which she had heard one night. The door was however locked: but a crowbar from Chiffin's pocket speedily forced it open. The room which they now entered, and which was tolerably well furnished, was found to be unoccupied; but it evidently had not been long without a tenant: for the bed had not been made since it was last slept in, while other indications justified the belief. Issuing from this room, they were about to examine the next, when a loud cry coming from overhead, thrillingly reached their ears. That cry—it was instantaneously recognised by Henrietta! Those piercing accents—the wild lamentation which characterised them—the penetrating anguish of the sound—all were the same!

A staircase at the end of the passage caught their eyes. They hastened to ascend it; but their way was suddenly impeded by a trap-door closing the top. It was secured by a staple and a padlock; but Chiffin's crowbar speedily forced these obstacles. The quick trampling of feet, as if some one were rushing towards the trap-door, met the ears of the searchers; and the moment the door itself was removed, Henrietta beheld, by the light of the lamp, the ghastly and unmistakable countenance of her unknown friend, gazing in mingled terror and suspense down the opening.

It was a long loft to which Lady Bess, the Cannibal, and Henrietta had thus found their way: and until the moment when the light of the lamp developed the features of the scene,

the captive had been entombed in darkness. A truckle bedstead, a washing-stand, a table, a chair, and a few other necessaries, were all the furniture to be seen in that dreary, dismal place. And there was the unfortunate prisoner himself, enveloped in the long dressing gown secured at the waist, and with that pale thin countenance which, once seen could never be forgotten!

The unfortunate being recoiled in dismay from the ferocious looks of Chiffin the Cannibal, who was highest up the staircase: but gathering courage, he gazed down again, and seemed stricken with surprise at beholding a female in man's attire. Then he caught sight of Henrietta Leyden, whom he at once recognised; and a smile of satisfaction, amounting even to joy, spread itself over his countenance. Still, in all these rapidly varying changes of expression, there was blended a certain wild vacuity, which if not indicative of complete mental aberration, at all events denoted a partial disorder of the reason.

"Speak to him; he seems to recognise you," said Lady Bess to Henrietta.

"We come to deliver you, if you like to go away with us," the young maiden accordingly said, in the gentle accents of her sweetly musical voice.

"Yes, yes—I will go away with you," was the response, joyfully delivered; and without another word, the stranger descended the stairs in the rear of the three persons who had rescued him.

"But he never can leave the house in this guise," said Lady Bess aside to Henrietta. "We must obtain proper apparel for him. Let us see how it is to be managed."

"Perhaps the footman may have some plain clothes?" suggested Henrietta: "for neither Lord Everton's nor Mr. Bellamy's would fit him."

While this rapid exchange of whispered observations was going on, the party had threaded the passage, descended the staircase, and reached the landing whence opened the apartment where the prisoners had been left.

"Remain here," said Lady Bess: and she passed into the dining-room.

Lord Everton at once began pouring for the most piteous entreaties that she would not take away with her the individual whom he suspected she had just rescued from captivity: but she paid no regard to his prayers: and ordering Mat the Cadger to loosen the

footman from his bonds, she bade the domestic follow her. This command he promptly obeyed; and when outside the room, Lady Bess said to him, "Has this unfortunate creature got any other clothes of his own, besides the wretched things he has on?"

"Clothes? no, sir—ma'am," responded the footman, not knowing exactly whether to address Lady Bess as a male or a female: for although there could be no doubt as to her sex, yet he knew not in what style she herself might choose to be spoken to.

"Then I suppose he has been here a long time?" she said inquiringly.

"Yes—a long, long time," answered the footman. "But I have got some clothes of my own," he added, "which are very much at his service—very much indeed."

"Hasten and fetch them," said the heroine: but as the footman was hurrying away, she made a sign for Chiffin to accompany him.

In a few minutes they returned, the footman bearing a large bundle of clothing: and the mysterious unknown was desired to pass into the nearest vacant room and put them on. This he did, and in about ten minutes came issuing forth, considerably improved in appearance, and wearing a look of delight at the change thus effected in his garb. There was however something childish in this look,—another indication that the mind of the unhappy man was indeed somewhat unsettled. Lady Bess perceived this and hesitated for a moment whether she ought really to take the strange being away. But recollecting the intense anxiety of Lord Everton to prevent her—the heavy bribe he had offered—and the information which she herself had gleaned during the day, she hesitated no longer.

"Now," she said to the footman, "you can return to your employers:"—and she made an imperious sign towards the door of the room where they had remained bound to their chairs. "You can also tell my two men to rejoin me."

"eg pardon," said the footman, "but I see there's most 'a be a rumpus about him;"—glanced towards the pale un-

"If so be such a thing as a wanted—"

"The suggestion is not bad," Lady Bess. "At the same 1st attend to the matter to-
at is your name?"

"Theodore Barclay," responded the footman; "at your service, ma'am—sir—ma'am—"

"Very well, Theodore Barclay," said Lady Bess. "You can inquire to-morrow or next day at the post office in Hornsey if there is a letter for you; and should you find one, you will do well to attend to any appointment it may indicate."

"Depend upon it I shall not fail. But mum's the word:"—and thus speaking, he retreated back into the dining-room in obedience to another sign hastily and imperatively made by Lady Bess.

Mat the Gaffer and Spider Bill now came forth from that room where they had been keeping guard: and the little party descended to the hall, where the gardener and the two female servants had remained in the custody of Tony Wilkins. These servants were not a little surprised to behold the pale-faced stranger in company with the intruders and Henrietta: they did not however say a word—and the party emerged from the house.

Ravish, can you possibly depict to yourself the feelings of lively joy—the emotions of exultant bliss—which arose in the heart of Henrietta Laydon as she once more breathed the fresh air of liberty? for the instant all other considerations were lost sight of: she remembered not the evidently too desperate character of those to whom she owed her deliverance—she thought not of the possibility of her prolonged absence having proved fatal to her mother—she recollects not that another individual had been rescued that night. Nor was it until they were at some little distance from Beech-Tree Lodge, that she was recalled from that paradise of abstraction to the full remembrance of all other things.

"Now, Miss Laydon," said Lady Bess, stopping short near that point where the diverging road joined the main one, "have you any settled plan to adopt any home to go to? If not, I will give you an asylum—"

"Oh, yes—I have a home—or at least I hope so—God grant that nothing may have happened to my poor mother in my absence!" she cried, thus giving audible expression to the anguished thought which suddenly recurred to her. "But I have not as yet expressed my gratitude to you for my deliverance. Oh! may I hope," she added in a low but fervid

whisper, as she drew Lady Bess aside with the sudden force of a nervous agitation,—“may I hope that I have not altogether comprehended some portion of what has passed within those walls ?”

“I know to what you allude,” interrupted Lady Bess; “the appropriation of certain little things by the men who accompanied me? Think no more of that—or at all events talk of it no more. Rest contented with your deliverance. You see that I did better than place your note in the hands of the police-authorities, as its terms enjoined. Had I done so, they would not have interfered, Beech-Tree Lodge being really licensed as a mad-house. I was therefore compelled to strike a bold and prompt blow to deliver you. I have done it: and surely you are not disposed to quarrel with the means employed ?”

“I am incapable of ingratitude,” replied Henrietta energetically. “Tell me the name of her to whom I am so much indebted ?”

“In my present apparel I am Captain Chandos,” responded the heroine: “if I were in a female garb I should be Mrs. Chandos. Here,” she continued, taking a card from a case, “is my address. Perhaps you will like to learn more of that strange being whom we have this night delivered? If so, you can call upon me: for I purpose to take him with me. And now tell me—are you happy in your own circumstances? would money be of any service to you ?”

“No, no,” replied Henrietta, giving perhaps a little more vehemence to her response than was altogether consistent with the gratitude she owed Lady Bess: but still the girl’s honest feelings were predominant at the time.

“I understand you,” said the heroine, neither moved nor offended. “You are afraid that whatsoever gold my purse may contain, is not honestly acquired? Well, if you need no pecuniary assistance, so much the better. And now, one word more ere we part. It will be well that no noise should be made about the adventure of this night. I have a claim upon your gratitude; and the way in which you can testify it is by taking care that your friends do not seek redress at the hands of justice for whatsoever you may have suffered from Lord Everton. Because if once you endeavour to put the law in force, you cannot tell half the truth, but must ex-

plain it all; and if you loudly proclaim how you got into Beech-Tree Lodge, you will be compelled to proclaim as loudly how you got out of it. This might lead to unpleasant inquiries after myself; and these of course you would not willingly be the means of setting afoot.”

“Depend upon it I will do nothing to compromise you,” answered Henrietta. “And excuse me if I add—with the deepest, deepest sincerity—that may God grant you never do more to injure yourself than I shall do to injure you !”

“You are a good girl,” rejoined Lady Bess: “but it is evident that our paths run in opposite ways in life. Nevertheless we shall meet again: for I know that you will come and see me.”

Thus speaking, the amazonian lady wrung Henrietta’s hand; and a separation then took place—Lady Bess, with the stranger and her companions, proceeding one way, and Miss Leyden in another.

Long, lonely, and weary was the walk—or rather run—which the young damsel had at that mid-night hour (for so late it now was) until she reached Holloway; and thence she obtained a conveyance into London. It was two in the morning when she reached the court in the vicinage of Soho, where she had last seen her mother and Charley. Oh! with what a beating heart did she approach the door—with what deep and painful misgivings did she await the response to her summons! She looked up to see if there were a light in the attic-window: but there was none.

At the expiration of five minutes she heard steps approaching down the passage from within: the door opened—and the landlady appeared with a light, she started on beholding Henrietta: but hurried and breathless was the inquiry which the young girl made. Her mother was alive: this was the instantaneous source of an almost overpowering joy! But she was very, very ill: and this second intimation produced as quick a re-action of the feelings. She was still in the house—but in a better room, on the first floor. The benevolent gentleman—Mr. Gunthorpe by name—who had interested himself in the poor family, had wished to have her moved into the country, a little way out of London: but poor Mrs. Leyden had declared that she would remain in that house until her daughter returned; so that

when she *did* return there might be no unnecessary delay ere they met—and if she never returned, then the unhappy mother would die there!

Such was the information which Henrietta gathered from the landlady's words; and even this she would not have paused to receive, had not her feelings been so overpowering for the first few minutes as to prevent her from speeding up to her mother's chamber. But at length recovering the use of her limbs, she was enabled to obey the dictates of her heart; and rushing up the stairs, she was in a few moments clasped in Mrs. Leydon's arms. Little Charley awoke; and that was indeed a happy meeting! For in the midst of kisses, and tears, and fervid embraces, Henrietta breathed a few words in her mother's ears—but sufficient to make that parent understand and give her the assurance that pure and stainless as her daughter was when she went away, so pure and stainless did she return.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE BARGE.

IT was the night after the adventures at Beech-Tree Lodge, and between ten and eleven o'clock. A lantern was suspended to the ceiling of the cabin of the barge moored in the canal at Agar Town; and at the little round table three persons were seated. These were Chiffie the Cannibal, Mr. Tugs, and the latter's wife. The cupboard was removed from the recess which it usually occupied, the aperture being thus left ready for the Cannibal to pass into his lurking-hole should any visitor of a suspicious character make his appearance. Upon the table stood a bottle of gin, the product of one of the illicit stills worked in the neighbourhood; and three glasses showed that the persons in the cabin had been partaking of the alcoholic

Tugs and the Cannibal were

smoking their pipes; while Mrs. Tugs was tucking the child, which was about

nine months old. She was a man, and if clean would have been looking and not altogether t she had a somewhat grimy, and was not over tidy in her

said the Cannibal, removing his pipe from his mouth and

vomiting forth a cloud of smoke, "I wonder whether Madge Somers will come here to night? You say that she was here last night, just after I had left the barge to meet Lady Bess at Hornsey church?"

"Yes: Madge came last night," responded the woman, to whom the question was addressed. "Tugs had gone up into the Town to see some of the blue-ruin brewers"—meaning the workers of the illicit stills—"and so I was here all alone."

"And she wouldn't leave no message, then?" said Chiffie inquisitorily.

"On'y that she would come back again to-night, and that you was to keep close till she did. So I suppose she will be here soon."

"I hope so," observed Chiffie with one of his wonted growls; for I am precious tired of being cooped up here. At the same time, mind you, I am very much obliged to you, Mrs. Tugs, and your husband, for making me so comfortable: but for a man which likes his liberty, this here sort of confinement isn't altogether the thing."

"And yet you had a little change last night," observed Tugs. "It was a pity it didn't turn out better for you."

"For my part I was precious savage at the disappointment," remarked the Cannibal. "Taking all that risk without getting a penny by it!"

"Well, it was parwokin', no doubt," said Tugs, as he filled the three glasses from the bottle. "But I say, who is that Lady Bess, as you call her? I never see her afore. What a smart-looking creatur' she is."

"An' doesn't she look well in that there dress she wears!" exclaimed Mrs. Tugs. "What a elegant-fitting frock-coat! It gave her quite a man's look—except about the bust, which is rayther too full to let the disguise be complete. I should think she must look uncommon well in her own proper dress—I mean when togged as a woman."

"I never see her dressed in any other way but as she was last night," observed the Cannibal. "She is a queer creature, no doubt."

"Do you mean she is a rum un as a woman?" asked Tugs.

"No—not in that sense," replied Chiffie. "I never heard anything against her: quite t'other way—for it is said she hasn't even the feelings and passions of her sex—no lovers, and therefore no intrigues. Such is what they say of her: but I believe precious

few really know anything about Lady Bess."

"She's quite the lady," said Mrs. Tugs. "And what a nice-spoken creatur' too! One would think she was a person of quality—quite!"

"I should say she's quite the *gentleman*," observed Tugs with a laugh. "Her manner is so good, and she has such a sort of offhand way with her, it's quite pleasant to hear her talk and observe her hattitudes. She's a dandy after her own sort: but yet not one of them kind of dandies that you'd like to kick all along a street. What do you think, Chiffin? You know more about her than we do."

"I know deuced little about her," responded the Cannibal, "She's always in just the same mood you saw her last night—first-rate spirits, and with that sort of jovial frankness and open-heartedness, as one may say that somehow makes you like her. And then, although engaged with her in business that puts you on a sort of equality, you can't help feeling the whole time that you are with a superior. That woman exercises what we may call an ascendancy over one; and however much you mayn't like to acknowledge it to yourself, still you can't help feeling it. Did you notice what a pair of eyes she has? don't they seem as if they could pierce you through and through?"

"I never saw such splendid eyes in all my life," said Mrs. Tugs. "And what teeth too! I should think the handsomest and proudest young lord in the land would be glad to get a kiss from such lips as them."

"And I think that he was to attempt it," replied Chiffin, "he'd get Lady Bess's whip pretty comfortably over his shoulders. At least, if all I have heard tell about her is true, that she hasn't got the feelings of the sex—"

"How extr'orinary!" said Mrs. Tugs, apparently in a musing strain. "I know blessed well I've got all them ere feelings:—"and as she thus spoke, to all appearance in a very sentimental mood, she emptied her glass, except two or three drops which she let drain down the baby's throat.

"I see that the little creatur' likes blue-ruin as well as his ma," observed Chiffin with a laugh: but there was something horrible and ferocious even in the most good-humoured laugh which Mr. Chiffin could possibly assume.

"It's natur'," said Mrs. Tugs. "Natur'

makes us all love lush from our wery birth. Lord bless yer! I've seen smaller babbies than this von suck down the blue-ruin just as if it was their mother's milk. But what more about this Lady Bess that I'm quite interested in? If so be she was raly a man, I should make Tugs jellus. Where does she bide?"

"Ah! that she keeps precious dark to herself," replied Chiffin. "But I know that she is mostly seen about Edmonton and Tottenham; and one or two of my pals have twigged her more than once riding about them neighbourhoods in a lady's dress—a habit as they call it,—and looking quite elegant and tip-top like. There must be summut very rum about that woman's history!"

"There must indeed, from all you have said," observed Mrs. Tugs. "And so she actually does business on the highway? What a bold dashing creatur' she must be! If I was a rich young gen'elman I shouldn't at all mind being robbed by such a highwayman as that. You don't know, then, what made her take to the road?"

"Not I," responded Chiffin. "All that I know about her I've told you."

"And so the adventure of last night turned out a failure, did it?" said Tugs as he filled the glasses again.

"Oh! a precious failure," answered Chiffin: "nothing got by it! But I wonder whether this precious Madge is coming to-night. I am deucedly in want of the fresh air—"

"Why don't you take a little stroll along the towing-path?" said Tugs, "The night's dark enow, and you ain't likely to meet any unpleasant customers. If Madge comes we can keep her till you return."

"So I will," observed Chiffin: and having tossed off the contents of his glass, he ascended from the cabin, stepped ashore, and sauntered along the bank of the canal.

"Now, Polly," said the Blue-ruin Carrier when he and his wife were alone together in the cabin, "has no hidear struck you at all?"—and he looked very hard at her.

"You mean that Chiffin's got money about him?" replied the woman, returning the look.

"That's just what I do mean," said her husband, drawing closer towards her and speaking in a still lower and more significant tone. "I'm sure he has; and I don't believe for a minute that the affair of last night turned out

so queer. Chiffin never would have took it so quiet—he's not the chap." "That's what I thought," responded Mrs. Tugs. "And now, d'ye know why I took and questioned him so much about Lady Bess?"

"Woman's coorosity, I s'pose," was the response.

"Woman's fiddlestick!" cried Mrs. Tugs. "It was just to see whether Chiffin would speak in a way to show he had been disappointed with Lady Bess last night: If he had, it would have appeared in his manner: he couldn't have concealed it—it would have been uppermost in his mind, and so have showed itself in his observations. But it didn't: and so I'm as sure that he got loads of swag last night as that I'm suckling this here blessed baby."

"What a clever woman you be, Polly, was the compliment now paid her by her husband, "Who'd have thought you was pumping the Cannibal all the time you seemed to be chatting so cosy and familiar?"

"Well, but it was so," replied Mrs. Tugs: "and is that feller hasn't got his pockets lined with blunt, I'll set this baby up at a mouthful—I will."

"A precious mean chap he is, then!" exclaimed Tugs now looking particularly ferocious through the black grime on his face.

"Mean!" echoed his wife: "he's a measly skin-flint—coming here, bolting our grub, and swallowing our lush, and just giving us a shilling or two tow'rds housekeeping, when he ought to come down handsome and make us a jolly good present. I'm sick of such conduct, I be."

"Well, Polly, if what's passing in my mind is passing in your'n too, we'll have the whole of his blunt afore many hours is over:"—and the man looked hard at his wife to read her answer in her countenance.

"When a chap behaves his-self as Chiffin is doing now," she replied, "I would as soon draw a knife across his throat and sink him in the canal as I'd eat my dinner. So if you're the man, Tugs, to do the job, I'm the woman as will help yer."

"Then I'm blowed if it isn't as good as done," responded the Blue-ruin Carrier: "perwived we settles how it is to be done—that's all."

"Done? Why, in the way I've said," was the quick answer given by his wife. "Hush! some one calls."

Tugs hastily jumped up from his

seat, and thrust his head out of the hatchway of the cabin. A woman was standing in the towing-path; and through the gloom Tugs at once recognised Madge Somers.

"All right!" he said. "Come on board." Madge accordingly stepped on the barge, and descended into the cabin. Tugs offered her some gin; but she refused to take it—immediately adding, "Where is he?"

"What news have you got for him?" asked Tugs, evading the woman's question.

"Good news," she replied. "But where is he, I ask?"

"Well, that's pity," said Tugs: "for he's gone out for the night again."

"How provoking!" exclaimed Madge Somers. "But if he didn't mind running these risks, what was the use of my troubling myself to get the thing put right and square for him? I cannot wait till he returns. I cannot come back again when he is likely to be here; and therefore I must leave a message with you. You can tell him that the business is hushed up, and that her ladyship has intimated to the police that all her things have been restored to her on condition that she would not move any further in the matter, and that as she has got them back her object is answered. Of course a single word from her ladyship was sufficient to stop the proceedings: and so Chiffin has nothing more to fear in that quarter."

"This will be good news for him," said Tugs. "He told me he shouldn't be back till just upon daylight, and I am going to sit up for him."

"Then you can deliver my message," said Madge; and appearing to be somewhat in a hurry, she took her departure.

"Well, didn't I manage capital to parwent the woman stayng?" said Tugs. "If she had, Chiffin would have flitted away on hearing the news and, we should have been balked in our job—eh, Polly?"

"Yes—you managed capital," responded the woman. "Now mind you manage as well presently when the thing is to be done—that's all."

The husband and wife then drew closer together until their faces almost met; and in subdued whispers did they discourse upon the murderous project they had devised.

In the meantime Madge Somers, when quitting the barge, had pursued

her way along the towing-path; and at a short distance she encountered Chiffin the Cannibal.

"Ah!" she exclaimed: "then you have altered your mind?"

"Altered my mind?" he repeated, in a growling tone. "What the deuce are you talking about?"

"Why, in coming back so soon—that is how you have altered your mind: for I suppose you are now on your way to the barge?"

"To be sure. I only just came out to get a mouthful of fresh air. I can't endure being cooped up in that coffin-like place."

"Then what made you tell those people that you did not intend to return till close upon daylight?"

"You don't mean to say they told you that?" exclaimed Chiffin.

"But I do though: and that's the reason I did not stop. I however left a message with them for you—"

"And what's it about? Have you made it all right?"

"Yes—after a great deal of trouble," responded Madge. "Her ladyship has intimated to the detectives who had the thing in hand, that she does not wish the proceedings to go any farther. The excuse she made was that somebody had been to her, brought all the things back that had been stolen from the house, and besought her mercy and forbearance; and that therefore, as her chief object was gained in recovering her valuables, she was disposed to grant the request. In short, she gave the detectives to understand that she did not choose to have trouble and discomfort of a prosecution, especially as she was very soon going out of town. The detectives went and called upon her ladyship in consequence of this note which she sent them: but as she gave them each a pretty handsome sum for the trouble they had already taken, they of course promised to follow her directions. So as far as that affair goes, you are safe enough. I saw Tony Wilkins just now; and he told me that you had a fine affair of it last night—heaps of money, besides a lot of diamonds and other valuables: so what with the swag you got from Lady Saxondale, the money I gave you a little time back, and the produce of last night, you must be quite rich."

"Well, do you mean to turn borrower, Madge?" asked Chiffin, evidently not relishing the woman's discourse, and fancying that it was a pre-

lude to demanding some pecuniary favour at his hands.

"Don't be afraid, Chiffin," she replied, having read what was passing in his mind. "You know that I am not one who asks favours of that sort: or if you don't know it, you ought to do so—for you and I have been acquainted long enough. What I was going to say is, why don't you settle down into some quiet kind of life—take a public or a shop, for instance—or even set up a lodging-house?"

"No, no—a public is the thing for me," answered Chiffin; "a good boozing-ken in some precious queer neighbourhood, I should be in my glory there; and to tell you the truth, Madge, I have been thinking of summum of that kind. Now that this cursed affair of the detectives is over, I shall look about me. But I say, wasn't it rather queer of these Tugs people to tell you such a precious lie? I can't think what could be the meaning of it."

"Evidently to prevent me from waiting to see you," replied Madge. "You had therefore better take care of them: there's some treachery lurking in that quarter."

"Well now," observed Chiffin in a musing tone, "I thought them Tugs was the honestest people towards their pals that ever was. Of course I didn't tell them I had anything in the shape of blunt about me, for fear they should get on the borrowing plan; and one couldn't very well refuse what they asked after all their kindness. But there's something that isn't right in that quarter. I don't like this affair of their stalling you off from seeing me: it looks precious suspicious."

"Well," returned Madge, "you have no need to go back to the barge again unless you like."

"Yes—but I have thought," replied Chiffin: "for to tell you the truth—But no matter! I must get back as quick as ever I can. Good night, Madge—and thank you for what you have done."

The woman and the Cannibal then separated, and the latter sped along in the direction of the barge. He had indeed good reason for returning thither; inasmuch as he had left his great loose shaggy overcoat in the little nook or recess that formed his place of concealment; and in that self-same coat he had got a quantity of bank-notes sewn inside the lining. But as he went back to the barge, he

felt in his breeches' pockets to see that his pistols were safe, muttering to himself the while, "If these Tugs mean treachery, I'm blowed if I don't make them both sleep at the bottom of the canal before daylight—and their babbys along with 'em for that matter."

Resuming however his wonted look, which with all his endeavour to give it a good humoured aspect, was still of the most hang-dog and sinister character, he reached the boat and gave a peculiar whistle. The head of Tugs was soon perceived thrust above the hatchway—the assurance that all was right came from that individual's lips—and Chiffin descended into the cabin. He cast a quick but keenly-searching glance upon Tugs and his wife; but nothing in their looks betrayed any treacherous purpose. Chiffin was not however the man to be thrown off his guard by this seeming equanimity on their part.

"How unfortunate you should have gone out just at the moment," exclaimed Tugs. "But perhaps you had the good luck to meet her?"

"Meet who?—Lady Bess?" exclaimed Chiffin, as if utterly unsuspecting.

"No—Madge Somers."

"Ah! she's been then? What news? Why the deuce didn't she wait?"

"She couldn't: she had summat particular to do. Besides, she had only a word to say."

"And what's that? asked Chiffin. "Anything good?"

"Pretty well," rejoined the Blue-ruin Carrier. "Madge says that it will all be right in the course of tomorrow; and she'll be down here by nine in the evening at the latest, when she is certain sure of having good news to tell yer. She says you may make yourself quite easy on that score."

"Perdition take it!" growled Chiffin, affecting to be in a rage. "Somehow or another I fancy that Madge is hounding me. Which way did she go? I have a deuced good mind to cut after her."

"I didn't see which way she went," answered Tugs. "Besides, she's been gone more than a quarter of an hour; and so you couldn't possibly overtake her, even if you knewed which way she did go."

"Come, Mr. Chiffin," said Mrs. Tugs, looking as amiable as she could through the grimy mask upon her face, "you had better make up your mind to rest

patient and be comfortable till to-morrow evening. It isn't very long to wait; and from what Madge said, it's certain sure you'll hear good news then."

"Well, I suppose I must" returned the Cannibal with the air of one who resigns himself to a temporary disappointment.

"Take another glass of the lusb," said the Blue-ruin Carrier, as he passed the bottle. "It's a famous thing to make chaps happy and contented."

"With all my heart," responded Chiffin; and having to-ged off the liquor, he lighted his pipe.

The conversation progressed upon indifferent subjects; and while joining in it with seeming unconcern, the Cannibal revolved in his mind the course that he should adopt. That Tugs and his wife meant treachery was evident enough; their conduct in respect to Madge Somers proved this. That they had not discovered the bank-notes in his coat, he felt assured; because if so, and if they had self-appropriated them, there would be no need of that stratagem to keep him still in the barge. He therefore argued that they supposed him to have money concealed about his person, and meant to murder him to obtain it. He had his pistols in his pockets, and they were loaded; he had a great mind to produce them suddenly and shoot both the man and woman at once; but there was the chance of the report being heard by individuals who might be passing along the towing-path, or up in the houses overhanging the canal. Then he thought of suddenly felling the Blue-ruin Carrier with his club, and at once turning round to despatch the wife. But if the first blow should fail in its effect, a desperate struggle might take place; for he knew that the woman was a determined one—while Tugs himself was a man of great muscular power—and therefore the result of such struggle might prove fatal to himself. His chief object was, as a matter of course, to recover possession of his coat: but if he went into the little crib to obtain it, he felt assured that he should be immediately attacked from behind and murdered. Even if he got possession of his coat by means of a stratagem, it would be difficult for him to get safe out of the barge without first making away with Tugs and his wife; for if he pretended to go out for any purpose, they would attack him as he was ascending the

ladder and he would be overpowered. All things considered, the Cannibal came to the conclusion that he must anticipate the intimation of the Blue-ruin Carrier and Mrs. Tugs by murdering them both. But then *again* recurred the question, how was this to be done?

Suddenly an idea struck him; and he now saw his way clearly enough.

"What a terrible close place this is to live in, to be sure!" he said in a careless sort of way, taking advantage of a pause in the discourse to make the remark. "I do believe it would kill me outright in a very short time."

"Why, you see, me and my old woman here is accustomed to it," responded Tugs.

"But it's the smell that's as bad as the heat" resumed Chiffin. "Boiled pork and greens is very nice things for dinner; but they leave an uncommon disagreeable odour in the place where they're cooked."

"But we had fried sassages to day," said Mrs. Tugs.

"Well, sassages leaves a smell too," said Chiffin. "And you had cabbages too, mind."

"But the bakker smoke takes all that away," cried the bargeman as he refilled his pipe.

"I am sure Mrs. Tugs don't like all these here smells," said the Cannibal—"greens, and sassages, and bakker smoke, and the canal, and what not—partickler in such a close place as this—do you, Mrs. Tugs? Now, what should you say," he continued with a grim smile upon his countenance, "if so be I was gallant enough to give you a bottle of scent, which to tell you the truth I went out just now to buy at the hairdresser's up in the road?"

"I should say that it was rayther an extro'rn'ary thing for Mr. Chiffin to do," replied the woman, laughing.

"Then that same extro'rn'ary thing I have done," continued the Cannibal; and as he thus spoke he produced an elegantly-cut scent-bottle from the breast-pocket of the coat that he had on.

"Well, did you ever?" exclaimed Mrs. Tugs "If Lady Bess had done such a thing as this, one wouldn't have been astonished, 'cause she's so exceeding perlite."

"We never know," said the Cannibal, appearing to laugh in the merriest good-humour, "whose book we may take a leaf out of. Lend us your fogle, Mrs. Tugs."

"My ankercher, you mean?" she said. "Well, I do think I have got such a thing;"—and she produced a dirty rag which answered the purpose of the article named.

"I like scent very well at a distance," said Chiffin, as he poured a few drops from the little bottle on the handkerchief, holding his head somewhat back as he did so; "but I can't abear it near. Now, just you take and smell this. It's the most delicious scent you ever come near in all your life. Put that up to your nose, ma'am."

Mrs. Tugs, who appeared to enjoy the whole proceeding heartily and of course saw no sinister design in it, took the handkerchief amidst a great deal of laughing, and at once applied it to her nose. At the same instant she fell on the floor of the cabin, with the babe in her arms, as if stricken down by lightning: and also at the very self-same moment, Chiffin's club dealt a tremendous blow on the head of the Blue-ruin Carrier. But this blow so far from being fatal, did not even stun the man, who perhaps possessed a skull of more than ordinary thickness: or else the blow itself descended in a manner that could do little hurt notwithstanding the violence with which it was dealt. For an instant—and only for a single instant—did Tugs totter on his seat; and then springing up with a terrible imprecation, he closed with the Cannibal just as the latter was about to repeat the blow. The table was upset in an instant, and fell over the insensible woman and the stunned child as they lay upon the floor.

For a few moments the struggle with the two men was desperate: and then they fell heavily together. The Cannibal was undermost; and for an instant Tugs nearly throttled him—but with a desperate effort Chiffin threw his adversary off, and then was uppermost in his turn. Still Tugs held him in such a manner that he had not the free use of his arms: he could not reach his club which had dropped from his hands, nor take a pistol from his pocket. For a minute the contest was frightful: the wretches glared upon each other's arms—they gnashed their teeth—foam was upon their lips—their struggles and convulsions were the fullest developments of extraordinary muscular power. Again did they roll over: again was the Cannibal in the most perilous position. Another instant, and he would have been

strangled by his adversary: but suddenly catching that individual's nose between his teeth, he bit it clean off. The man roared with the pain, and Chiffin was in an instant covered with the blood that streamed down upon him. The next moment the circumstances of the horrible contest were changed again: Tugs was underneath—Chiffin was uppermost—and the former, faint with excruciating pain and loss of blood, relaxed his hold on his diabolic enemy. Then the Cannibal was enabled to catch at his club; and with the tremendous bludgeon he beat out the Blue-ruin Carrier's brains.

Thus ended this horrible combat; and the conqueror stood in the midst of the cabin, wiping his adversary's blood from his face. The woman lay insensible upon the floor—the child was inanimate likewise. Chiffin deliberated with himself for a few moments how he should act. Should he kill the woman, or let her recover as she might? But when she recovered, would she not denounce him as the murderer of her husband? Assuredly she would: and therefore she must die!

Having come to this resolve, after a very brief self-consultation, Chiffin drew his clasp-knife from his pocket—opened it—and then plunged it deep down into the heart of the unfortunate woman. Not a sound escaped her lips: there was a slight convulsive movement of the body, as if a momentary spasm shot through it; and thus she passed from insensibility into death.

Chiffin drew out his clasp-knife from the flesh in which it was embedded—wiped it—and returned it to his pocket. The blood gushed forth in a torrent, pouring over the babe, and thus covering it with the sanguine tide from that very breast whence it had been wont to receive its nourishment.

The Cannibal, unmoved by the ghastly spectacle which he had himself created—unless indeed it were a grim satisfaction that he experienced in having done the fearful work and thus secured his safety and his vengeance at the same time—now procured water and a towel, and washed as well as he could the stains of murder from his person. This being done, he possessed himself of his coat from the recess, and was about to take his departure, when he bethought himself of the bottle which contained the chloroform. He had placed it on the table the instant he had poured some

of its contents on the handkerchief; the table had been upset—and where was the bottle? He searched, and found that it had fallen upon the garments of the woman: the stopper had not come out; and with infinite delight the Cannibal repossessed himself of an article which had already proved (according to his own notions) so exceedingly useful, and which might therefore be of the same utility on a future occasion.

The ruffian now at length quitted the barge, and was speedily at a distance from the scene of his fearful crime.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE LADY OF MANY LOVERS.

IT was about half-past ten o'clock on the same night of the frightful tragedy, that Lord Herold Staunton knocked at the door of Evergreen Villa in the Seven Sisters Road. The reader cannot have forgotten that this beautiful little suburban residence was the abode of Miss Emily Archer—*alias* Mademoiselle Emilie d'Almber—the fascinating *dameuse*, who had succeeded in ensnaring the foolish and frivolous Lord Saxondale in her meshes. Prettily furnished as the villa was previously to her acquaintance with him, it now presented a spectacle of almost oriental luxury: that is to say, in miniature. Everything that the taste of a most extravagant woman could possibly fancy, or that the infatuation of a reckless spendthrift could supply, in the shape of exquisite furniture, mirrors, pictures, ornaments, nicknacks, and costly trifles of every variety, was now to be seen within the walls of that villa. The connection of Lord Saxondale with Miss Archer had been exceedingly brief as to time, but had already proved wonderfully expensive as to money. She had introduced him to a person of whom we shall have to speak more anon and who was supplying him with funds at a most exorbitant rate of interest: and by far the greater portion of the moneys thus obtained, went to gratify the syren's whims and caprices.

Miss Archer remained upon the stage for several reasons. In the first place she liked the excitement connected with ballet—she liked the applause bestowed upon the dancers—

she liked the flattery and the flirting that took place behind the scenes—and she liked to see the name of Mademoiselle Emilie d'Alembert in the newspapers. She moreover knew that her connexion with Lord Saxondale could not last for ever; and she regarded her position at the Opera as the means of obtaining a new admirer when circumstances should sooner or later sever her from the present one. She liked, too, to have an opportunity of boasting her good fortune in the presence of the other ballet-dancers; for she fancied that her position was a very brilliant one, and that instead of any shame being attached thereto, it was exceedingly enviable and admirable.

But returning from our digression, we must hasten to describe wherefore Lord Harold Staunton was on the particular night of which we now speak, paying a visit to Evergreen Villa. On knocking at the door he inquired of the servant who answered the summons if Lord Saxondale were within?—but before any answer could be given, that young nobleman himself rushed out of the exquisitely furnished parlour on the ground-floor, exclaiming, “I thought I could not be mistaken: I knew it was your voice! Come in, my dear fellow—I am delighted to see you!”

Lord Harold accordingly entered the parlour, where a supper consisting of all imaginable delicacies and dainties was spread upon the table, and where Emily herself was lounging negligently on a sofa. She was dressed—or rather we should say undressed—in a French wrapper trimmed with the most costly lace; and her beautiful dark hair was flowing in luxuriant masses over a neck more exposed than was consistent with perfect modesty.

“Ah, Lord Harold!” she said, extending her hand to the young nobleman, with whom she was well acquainted, and indeed had been very intimately acquainted on some former occasion: “I am glad to see you at the villa. But, you naughty man, you! what have you been doing? fighting a duel! Oh fie! I am shocked at you.”

“It is one of those unfortunate occurrences, Miss Archer,” responded Staunton, with a forced gaiety, “which will happen in life. Here is our friend Saxondale who will some day or another have to do the same thing. Who knows, indeed, but that he may

be compelled to fight a duel on your account?”

“Oh, that would be amusing!” exclaimed Emily, clapping her hands gleefully, as if some new source of gratification had been suddenly developed to her mind; and she felt as Xerxes might have been supposed to feel had anybody suggested the “new pleasure” for discovery of which that royal voluntary offered a reward.

“I am very much obliged to you, my dear Emily,” said Lord Saxondale, “for wishing to place my life in jeopardy: but I am not enough tired of you yet to wish to be prematurely cut off from your sweet society.”

“Beautifully expressed!” exclaimed the *danseuse* “Don’t you think your friend Edmund is exceedingly witty and clever, Lord Harold?”

“Oh! I always told him so,” was the response: and Staunton, as he gave it, darted at Emily a quick glance of mockery, which she acknowledge by a transient archness of the curling lip. It was as much as to say on Lord Harold’s part, “You know he is a fool;” and on Miss Emily’s, “Of course I do.”

“Thank you both for the compliment,” cried Saxondale, taking it as such. “And now tell me, Harold, how is Deveril? have you heard anything more about him? For I saw by this morning’s paper that the report of his death was incorrect—that he survived—and that the wound is not even mortal, though terribly dangerous.”

“I know no more on the subject than you do,” answered Staunton. “In fact, I am playing at hide-and-seek till the result develops itself in one way or another. For of course until Deveril is pronounced completely out of danger, I am liable to arrest at any moment. But I want to speak to you, Saxondale, most particularly.”

“Is it any secret?” asked Edmund, glancing towards Emily, whom he was evidently fearful of offending by excluding her from a knowledge of what was about to be said.

“Just as you may think fit to decide,” responded Harold. “It is about that lady in the Spanish dress that you know of——”

“Ah! at the masquerade?” cried Saxondale. “Oh, no—what earthly necessary can there be for secrecy on that head? Besides, as I really have

no secrets at all from my dear Emily

"I understand," said Lord Harold: "you have already told Miss Archer everything about that little adventure of mine at the masquerade—that is to say, as far as you are acquainted with it."

"Well, to confess the truth, I have told Emily," observed Edmund. "But then she is discretion itself."

"And I do enjoy hearing of intrigues and adventures of that kind!" exclaimed the *danseuse*. "Do tell us, my dear Lord Harold, whether your adventure has turned out as you could wish: for we know nothing beyond the fact that in pursuance of a certain note you met some lady at that masquerade. Of course it is a delicious intrigue—a delightful affair of gallantry! Come, take some champagne, and then tell us all about it. What happened? and who was the fair *inamorata*?"

"Now," resumed Lord Harold after a brief pause, during which he reflected profoundly, "I have not the slightest objection to state the issue of my adventure: but will you, Edmund promise that whatsoever I may say you will not be shocked or annoyed? In a word, will you give me free permission to speak out frankly?"

"Why, of course," responded Saxondale, surprised at the question. "If it regarded either of my own sisters, or my lady-mother, I should like to hear all the particulars."

"Perhaps your random observation may reach a little nearer home than you imagine," observed Lord Harold.

"Ah! I begin to suspect," ejaculated Saxondale. "Is it possible that my own lady-mother has taken it into her head to play tricks of this sort? Well, now that I bethink me, it *was* exactly her height and figure—"

"And it was she herself!" rejoined Lord Harold.

"This is delightfully amusing!" exclaimed Emily Archer. "You were saying, Edmund, the other day that you wished you had some means of exercising a power over your mother, you know that she is doing her

any secret which would place my mother in my power. By Jove! she should not bully me then: I would very soon be even with her. Therefore, my dear Staunton, so far from offending me, you could not do me a greater service than by telling me all about this adventure of yours."

"It is too complicated at the present moment," replied Lord Harold; "and besides which, I want to obtain some positive proof of the fact that the Spanish Queen at the *mitradero* was Judy Saxon. In my own mind I know it was—I am morally certain of the identity: but as I did not see her face, she could of course turn round and indignantly deny the fact: for you will excuse me for saying, my dear, Edmund that your lady-mother is not wanting in what may be termed a bold effrontery."

"Wanting in it!" ejaculated Edmund. On the contrary, she has got plenty of it. But what sort of proof is it that you require. Harold, in the case we are speaking of?—and can I assist you in any way?"

"It is precisely your resistance that I require," answered Staunton; and I am sure that you will give it to me all the more readily after what you have been saying—because it is of course very convenient as well as important for you to get your mother completely under your thumb."

"To be sure! What would you have me do?"

"I suppose that you would not hesitate to avail yourself of an opportunity for searching Lucy Saxondale's wardrobes, and drawers, and cupboards, for some particular object—would you?"

"Not I indeed! I will ransack and rummage them from top to bottom if it is necessary for your purpose."

"It is," rejoined Harold. "Do you not comprehend? If we could only find the fancy-dress which Lady Saxondale wore at the masquerade, it would be impossible for her to deny her identity with the character of Queen Isabella. The chances are a hundred to one that the dress is secreted somewhere in her ladyship's apartments."

"And if so, I shall be sure to ferret it out," exclaimed Estremad.

"Oh, do, my dear Edmund," said Emily Archer, with witching accents and looks of cajolery. "I am always afraid that your proud and haughty mother will be separating you from

me: and it will be a great relief to my mind to know that you are in possession of a secret which will put her upon her good behaviour."

"I have already promised to do my best in the matter," responded Edmund. "I will go home to-morrow morning and watch for an opportunity to ransack the place: although, by the bye, I did not intend to show my face there for the next week—for the old housekeeper is dead, and somehow or another I have a great aversion to be beneath the same roof with a dead body. It is not, you know, that I am in any way frightened; but it seems as if there was a sickly smell—a nauseating kind of odour. However, I will return to Saxondale House immediately after breakfast to-morrow morning. But still, my dear Harold, I cannot make all this affair out. What on earth did my mother meet you at the Harcourt's for, after writing that letter—unless it was to arrange matter for a future appointment?"

"Don't question me any more now," interrupted Staunton. "It is a very extraordinary story, and I will give you all the particulars when we have obtained the proof that you are to seek for. So you must restrain your curiosity—and Miss Archer likewise. I suppose I can see you here again to-morrow evening?"

"Yes—but what on earth is to prevent you from staying here with us for a few days until this duel affair is blown over? You will give him house room—won't you, Emily?"

"Oh! with the greatest pleasure, if his lordship will condescend to accept such hospitality as my humble residence afford;"—but the look of proud satisfaction which the *danseuse* cast around the exquisitely-furnished room, was in flat contradiction to the humility of her words.

"An offer so kindly made cannot be rejected," remarked Staunton, with a smile. "I therefore accept your hospitality, and will instal myself here for a few days."

Throughout the whole of this discourse the champagne bottle was frequently put into requisition: and it was not until a late hour that Staunton conducted to the chamber appropriated to his use. In the morning breakfast was served at about ten o'clock; and this repast, like the supper of the previous night, consisted of all imaginable delicacies. It was about eleven when Lord Saxondale took his

departure for the purpose of accomplishing his pleasant and agreeable little task of endeavouring to discover proofs damning to Lady Saxondale's reputation.

Lord Harold Staunton remained alone in the beautifully-furnished parlour with Miss Emily Archer; and no sooner was Edmund out of sight, than a great and sudden change took place in the bearing of these two towards each other. The courteous respect with which Harold had treated the handsome *danseuse* while Edmund was present, now turned into the familiarity of closest intimacy.

"Well, my dear Emily," said Harold, "you have got my friend Edmund tolerably tight and secure in your silken chains. But no wonder: for you are certainly handsomer than ever."

"I would rather receive those few words of compliment from your lips, Harold," was the lady's response, "than ten thousand of the mawkish and insipid flatteries which that frivolous fellow Saxondale bestows upon me. But come, sir—why do you not embrace me for old acquaintance' sake?"

"That shall I do most cheerfully," rejoined Staunton: and he suited the action to the word. "So you find my friend Saxondale somewhat insipid?" he continued, placing himself by the beautiful dancer's side upon the sofa where she was half-reclining in her morning *negligee*.

"Of course you and I can talk these matters over confidentially between us," replied Emily; "and therefore we may admit to each other that of all the frivolous, foolish, conceited coxcombs, Edmund Saxondale is the worst. I really do not know one redeeming quality that he possesses—"

"Except the zeal which he displays in surrounding you with all luxuries and comforts," remarked Harold: "is it not so?"

"But that is conferring no boon upon me," rejoined the *danseuse*: it is the return he makes for the show of love with which I honour him. I understand he is engaged to be married to your sister? I have seen Lady Florina in her box at the Opera: what a beautiful girl she is? and what a sacrifice to bestow her on such a being as Saxondale!"

"My dear Emily, we must not touch upon that point," returned Lord Harold, somewhat gravely. "Marriages in high life, you know, are not always affairs of the heart, and there is not

much trouble taken to assort them with the nicest regard to outward looks or mental qualifications. And now let us change the discourse and talk upon any other topic you please. We have the prospect, I suppose, of being many hours together; and therefore we must render ourselves as agreeable as possible to each other."

"Are you sorry at having this prospect before you?" inquired Emily, with a look of mingled archness and tenderness.

"Sorry indeed!" how could bo possible? Are you not as charming as ever—or indeed more charming? for as I said just now, you are handsomer than when you and I used to be tolerably well acquainted a couple of years ago. Tell me, have you been happy since then? But I need scarcely ask. I have seen you bounding with joyous elasticity upon the stage; and I find you occupying a most beautiful little suburban residence. But tell me candidly, my dear Emily—how many lovers have you had during these two years past?"

"Well, I will tell you candidly, my dear Harold," responded the handsome but profligate *danseuse*, with a look of increasing archness most mischievously fascinating androgynously enchanting; and then, in the same playful mood, she counted off the names as she mentioned them on the tips of her long taper fingers with their rosy-tinted and almond-shaped nails. "First there was Lord Everton: but though he was very liberal and behaved very well indeed, I was obliged to turn him off; for he was so made up with falsities and artificialities—I mean in respect to his toilet—that he was absolutely repulsive to me. Then there was the Rev. Mr. Tarleton,—the fashionable preacher, you know, and whose opinions are so strongly evangelical. He was all very well, though he had not near so much money to bestow upon me as Lord Everton: but he would insist that I should go to his church twice every Sunday. He said that he could preach so much better when he saw me in my pew he felt that he was preaching for some one whose admiration he most of all loved to secure. He cared nothing about his wife, who is really a very handsome woman, being present in her pew: *that*, he said, was by no means the same thing. Well, I went for five or six Sundays: but I soon got tired of it—and because I flatly refused to go

again, we quarrelled and parted. Then circumstances threw me under the protection of Patrick O'Flanagan, the Member for Blarneyville; and as he drove a dashing four-in-hand, kept plenty of servants, and lived at a first-rate hotel I thought him a great catch. Now, to tell you the truth, my dear Harold, I was shamefully deceived by that man. He drank up every drop of wine and spirits that I had in my cellar—borrowed every farthing of money I have saved up—and even made me pledge my jewels to provide him with fresh funds. He was always expecting immense remittances from his Irish estates—but they never came. He was however such an agreeable fellow—so gay, so good-humoured, so full of fun, so sprightly and clever, that I was quite smitten with him. It was a sort of infatuation—so that I believed all he told me. He used to get me to write out his speeches to his dictation: and then he would learn them by heart, and go down to the House of Commons and surprise them all with what seemed to be a genuine outburst of extemporeaneous eloquence of the highest order. But on one occasion he made a very fatal mishap. Two distinct questions were coming on for discussion on the same night, and on both of which he intended to speak. For I afterwards found that he had been put in for Blarneyville by the Marquis of Donkeyderry, the patron of the borough; and so he was compelled to speak, and vote, and act, precisely in obedience to his lordship's directions. Well then, he had these two distinct subjects to speak upon for the same evening. One was the Irish Fisheries; and the other was the case of the Rajah of Rumamibrandypoor. So you may see that they were indeed very disreputable. Well, my friend Patrick O'Flanagan dictated two brilliant speeches, which I wrote down for him very carefully; and he learnt them by heart. He then prised himself with a couple of bottles of champagne, and went down to the House. But there, it appears, he took some ten or a dozen glasses of whiskey-toddy and Bellamy's: so that when the debates came on he did not precisely know whether he stood on his head or his heels. The first question was the Irish Fisheries—when up jumped O'Flanagan and began vomiting forth a perfect torrent of eloquence. But unfortunately it was the brilliant speech which related to the Rajah of Rumamibrandypoor.

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"Sorry indeed!" how could it be possible? Are you not as charming as ever—or indeed more charming? for as I said just now, you are handsomer than when you and I used to be tolerably well acquainted a couple of years ago. Tell me, have you been happy since then? But I need scarcely ask. I have seen you bounding with joyous elasticity upon the stage; and I find you occupying a most beautiful little suburban residence. But tell me candidly, my dear Emily—how many lovers have you had during these two years past?"

"Well, I will tell you candidly, my dear Harold," responded the handsome but profligate *danseuse*, with a look of increasing archness most mischievously fascinating and rouguishly enchanting: and then, in the same playful mood, she counted off the names as she mentioned them on the tips of her long taper fingers with their rosy-tinted and almond-shaped nails. "First there was Lord Everton: but though he was very liberal and behaved very well indeed, I was obliged to turn him off; for he was so made up with falsities and artificialities—I mean in respect to his toilet—that he was absolutely repulsive to me. Then there was the Rev. Mr. Tarleton,—the fashionable preacher, you know, and whose opinions are so strongly evangelical. He was all very well, though he had not near so much money to bestow upon me as Lord Everton: but he would insist that I should go to his church twice every Sunday. He said that he could preach so much better when he saw me in my pew he felt that he was preaching for some one whose admiration he most of all loved to secure. He cared nothing about his wife, who is really a very handsome woman, being present in her pew: that, he said, was by no means the same thing. Well, I went for five or six Sundays: but I soon got tired of it—and because I flatly refused to go

again, we quarrelled and parted. Then circumstances threw me under the protection of Patrick O'Flanagan, the Member for Blarneyville; and as he drove a dashing four-in-hand, kept plenty of servants, and lived at a first-rate hotel I thought him a great catch. Now, to tell you the truth, my dear Harold, I was shamefully deceived by that man. He drank up every drop of wine and spirits that I had in my cellar—borrowed every farthing of money I have saved up—and even made me pledge my jewels to provide him with fresh funds. He was always expecting immense remittances from his Irish estates—but they never came. He was however such an agreeable fellow—so gay, so good-humoured, so full of fun, so sprightly and clever, that I was quite smitten with him. It was a sort of infatuation—so that I believed all he told me. He used to get me to write out his speeches to his dictation: and then he would learn them by heart, and go down to the House of Commons and surprise them all with what seemed to be a genuine outburst of extemporeous eloquence of the highest order. But on one occasion he made a very fatal mishap. Two distinct questions were coming on for discussion on the same night, and on both of which he intended to speak. For I afterwards found that he had been put in for Blarneyville by the Marquis of Donkeyderry, the patron of the borough; and so he was compelled to speak, and vote, and act, precisely in obedience to his lordship's directions. Well then, he had these two distinct subjects to speak upon for the same evening. One was the Irish Fisheries; and the other was the case of the Rajah of Rumaniibrindypoor. So you may see that they were indeed very disreputable. Well, my friend Patrick O'Flanagan dictated two brilliant speeches, which I wrote down for him very carefully; and he learnt them by heart. He then privyed himself with a couple of bottles of champagne, and went down to the House. But there, it appears, he took some ten or a dozen glasses of whiskey-toddy and Bellamy's: so that when the debates came on he did not precisely know whether he stood on his head or his heels. The first question was the Irish Fisheries—when up jumped O'Flanagan and began vomiting forth a perfect torrent of eloquence. But unfortunately it was the brilliant speech which related to the Rajah of Rumand-

brandypoore. The house was astonished —the Speaker sate aghast. On he went, rushing like a madman through the wildest declamations against the East Indian Company, and drawing such a picture of the wrongs of the unfortunate Rajah of Runnem! brandypoore that he grew perfectly furious with the excitement of indignation into which he lashed himself. There he was, far away amidst the jungles of India—when he ought to have been with the shoals of herrings on the Irish coast! Of course this scene could not continue long: the House, recovering from its consternation, exploded in shouts of laughter—and poor O'Flanaghan's at length made sensible of his error. He fled from the House with precipitation, and next day accepted the Chiltern Hundreds. The Marquis of Donkeyderry then put his butler or his head groom—I forget which, but it's all the same—into the vacant borough of Blarneyville; and poor O'Flanaghan was never heard of a y more. I have been told that there is now a billiard-marker at Bath or Cheltenham very much resembling him: but I cannot answer for the truth of it."

Lord Harold Staunton laughed heartily at this anecdote, and complimented Miss Emily on the style in which she told it.

"Having thus lost my Irish lover," she continued, abandoning her hand to that of her companion, "I accepted the protection of a Judge; and he placed me in very handsome apartments at the West End. He was compelled to be exceedingly cautious in visiting me, as he was so well known. He was very liberal, and indulged me to the utmost of his means: so that I speedily regained the jewellery I had lost through the Member for Blarneyville. It appears that my friend the Judge was very fond of making pathetic speeches from the bench when sentencing prisoners. On one occasion, some time before I knew him, a case came before him at the Old Bailey, in which a servant girl was accused of convincing with a young man to rob her master's house. It transpired during the trial that the servant-girl had become infatuated with the young man—was seduced by him—and secretly admitted him into the house at night to remain with her. On one of those occasions he robbed the premises, while the poor unsuspecting girl was fast asleep. Her innocence, so far as

any complicity in the depredations was concerned, was most satisfactorily proven; while her lover was shown to be the guilty party. The Judge, in sentencing him and discharging her, made a long and most pathetic speech, showing the evils which arose from giving way to sensual passions; and he expatiated in such terms upon the dreadful effects of loose principles on the part of men and frailty on that of women, that he drew tears from every one in the court. In short, it was a perfect moral essay, and seemed to prove that the learned Judge who could deliver such sublime sentiments must himself be the most immaculate of men."

"But how does this anecdote apply to any thing in connexion with yourself, my dear Emily?" asked Lord Harold; "since it happened long before you knew your Judge?"

"You shall hear. I had been under his lordship's protection for about three months when I happened to discharge my house-maid and took another, the new comer having an excellent character from her last place. But only conceive the scene which ensued, when my Judge, on arriving one evening to sup with me, was instantaneously recognized by the new house-maid, who was the very same servant-girl he had so pathetically lectured at the Old Bailey. The consequence was the evaporation of the learned Judge from my lodgings; and the next day he enclos'd me a hundred-pound note as a token of adieu. I then passed under the protection of Mr. Walter of the Opera, and thence under that of Lord Saxondale. Such, my dear Harold, is a true and faithful narrative of my proceedings during the two past years."

"And now tell me, my dear Emily," said Staunton,—"because I am really interested in you,—have you managed to save any money during all this time?"

"I had saved a little previous to my acquaintance with O'Flanaghan: but he got it all out of me. Since then I could save nothing until within the last week or two; and now I am making a beginning again. But you don't know how money slips away with women in my position. When I look back and think of what I might have saved, I wonder where it has all gone, and why it has *not* been saved. Sometimes I think what a fool I am to spend so fast and so recklessly:

but it is all in vain to make good resolutions for the future. The fact is, women placed as I am can't save permanently. As I just now said, I am saving at present; but I dare say that something will arise at no distant time to sweep away all these savings."

"And tell me, Emily, do none of the young ladies connected with the Opera and who are under the protection of gentlemen, manage to save?"

"Not one out of one hundred ever does," was the reply. "The truth is, what they get at one time from the doating foolishness of some of their admirers, they themselves lavish at another time in their own infatuated folly upon penniless lovers. But this strain of conversation is a mournful one for me. I tell you what it does, Harold—it makes me think of the future; and *that* is something I do not like to think of. I know that as long as I am young, and handsome, and attractive, I shall be enabled to live in a handsome house, keep my carriage, and be surrounded with every luxury: but when my beauty begins to wane—Ah! then it will be very different! Now, this is the reflection which sometimes creeps in upon my mind, and saddens me deeply—deeply. Yes, it steals in like a spectre at a festival,—steals in, I say, even at those times when I have everything to make me happy: it comes like the gust of an ice-wind penetrating into the warm and perfumed atmosphere of a brilliantly lighted saloon. Do you comprehend me?"

"I do, Emily," responded Harold. "But surely it is your fault that there should be a cause for this apprehension? You have many opportunities of saving while you are young and beautiful and courted: why do you not avail yourself of them?"

"Ah! why—why—it is so easy to ask that question *why*! Ask the drunkard, when racked with the headache after his night's debauch, why he does not reform himself; and if he answer truly he will say it is because he has not the moral courage. Why, for instance, do you not reform your habits? why are you extravagant, and wild, and always in debt? Now you see I am speaking plainly: but it is not to offend you—merely to make your own conduct serve as an illustration to account for mine. I have got into certain ^{certain} ~~bits~~ of extravagance out of them. If

I have a whim it must be gratified, provided I have the means; and therefore I can scarcely hope ever to save continuously and put by a store for the future. I am saving now, as I have told you: but if you, for instance, wanted money at this moment, I would give you all my savings—because I like you."

"You are a good girl, my dear Emily," responded Harold, bestowing upon her another embrace. "But if I have been questioning you in this way, it was not for the purpose of ascertaining your means with a view of self appropriating them. I return you my thanks all the same."

"Well, the conversation has taken a turn to make me rather dull" said Emily, starting up from the sofa: "let us go and walk in the garden. The fresh air and the flowers will cheer and enliven us—at least they will have this effect upon me. You do not know how fond women in my position are of gardens, and flowers, and the country. And therefore," she added with a smile, "it cannot be said that our tastes are utterly perverted and depraved along with our morals."

Thus speaking, with all her wonted mischievous archness and roguish gaiety, the handsome *danseuse* led the way into the garden.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE RANSACKING OF THE WARDROBE-ROOM.

WHILE the preceding scene was taking place at Evergreen Villa, all London was ringing with the news of a frightful crime committed during the past night in a barge moored in that part of the canal which intersects Agar Town. It appeared that at a somewhat early hour that morning, a couple of Excise officers, in consequence of certain information received, had proceeded to pay a visit to that barge; but on descending the hatchway into the little cabin, they were horrified on beholding that spectacle which has been already described to the reader. The bargeman lay on one side of the cabin with his head so frightfully beaten and smashed and so covered with clotted blood, that it was scarcely recognizable as that of a human being; and a minuter search

showed that the wretched victim's nose had been bitten completely off and was lying at a little distance. On the other side of the cabin lay the bargeman's wife, who had evidently been murdered by a stab in the breast; and as if nothing should be wanting to complete this tragedy of horrors, the infant child had been smothered in the blood which had poured from its unfortunate mother.

Such was the account which was now horrifying all London: but from the flying rumours which prevailed, it did not appear that suspicion attached itself to any particular person or persons. The deed seemed to be shrouded in a dark mystery. There were all the evidences of a fearful struggle having taken place in the cabin; but the murderer or murderers had left no trace that might afford a clue to their discovery. Nevertheless, the most active officers of the detective force were already on the alert to endeavour to find some circumstances that should place them on the right scent.

Such was the narrative which young Lord Saxondale heard from some tradesman whose shop he entered to make a purchase in the vicinage of Park Lane. Thence he proceeded home, and straightway ascended to the drawing-room where his mother usually sat. Her ladyship was there, apparently engaged with a book, but in reality thinking over the various grave and serious subjects which agitated in her mind. She was just in one of those humours when the presence of Edmund was intolerable to her—for what reason she herself best knew. She did not therefore say anything to encourage him to remain in the room; and he accordingly resolved to avail himself of this opportunity to pursue the search for which purpose he had come. Having ascertained that his sisters were in their own apartment—and thus finding the coast to be clear—he ascended to his mother's private chambers.

An exquisitely furnished boudoir opened into the sleeping apartment; and beyond this was the wardrobe-room where her ladyship's dresses and articles of apparel were kept. If any of the maid-servants had been in the rooms at the time Lord Saxondale was prepared with some excuse; but as he found no one there, the necessity did not arise for displaying his ingenuity in that respect. It naturally struck him that if his mother had such good reasons as he supposed her

to have, for putting the masquerade dress altogether out of sight, it was sure to be under lock and key. He did not therefore take much trouble in investigating those wardrobes which were unlocked, but bestowed his attention upon the cupboards and closets that were closed. His hope had been that one of his own keys would fit these locks; but in this he was disappointed—and he therefore saw the necessity of obtaining possession of his mother's keys by some means or another. Issuing forth from her chambers again, he sauntered leisurely down the stairs, revolving in his mind three or four projects for obtaining possession of the keys. He likewise thought of repairing to a locksmith and purchasing a quantity of keys: but this latter plan he abandoned in consequence of the strange suspicion it was so well calculated to excite—or at all events he decided upon only having recourse to it in case other means should fail.

He returned to the room where her ladyship was seated; and on observing him re-enter she could not control a gesture of impatience and a look of annoyance.

"You appear a little out of sorts, my dear mother," he observed, with a subdued irony of accent: for he had not failed to notice that his presence was not altogether agreeable.

"It is so unusual a thing for you to seek my company now," replied Lady Saxondale coldly, "that I cannot help thinking you must have some ulterior object in view."

"I only came to have a little chat, my ladymother," answered Edmund: and the glance which he threw around, settled upon a bunch of keys lying on the table at which her ladyship was seated. "Have you heard the account of the horrid murder which has been committed in a barge on some canal?"

"I have not seen the newspaper yet," returned Lady Saxondale.

"I don't think it is in the newspaper—in fact it can't be; for it was only discovered this morning:"—and Edmund then proceeded to retail such particulars as he had learnt at the tradesman's shop.

Lady Saxondale made some remark upon the horrible nature of the case, and then appeared to bestow all her attention upon her book.

"There will be a hanging-affair for

that, I dare say," resumed Edmund with a negligent yawn. "For although there seems as yet to be no clue to the murderers, I have no doubt they will be found out in the long run: because it isn't often that a murder does go undiscovered. Now isn't that curious though? but it's really the case when I come to think of it."

Lady Saxondale raised her eyes, and looked at her son, as he thought, in a somewhat peculiar manner: but the next instant he supposed it could only be fancy on his part—and indeed her eyes were almost immediately bent down upon the book again.

"When is old Mabel to be buried?" he inquired after a pause.

"Why do you ask?" said Lady Saxondale quickly.

"Oh! only out of curiosity. I suppose by way of saying something—for you don't appear to be very much inclined for conversation."

"I am sorry to say that your conversation is seldom of a very entertaining or edifying character."

"Thank you, my dear mother, for the compliment. The ladies don't think so generally: for I know I am a precious great favourite amongst them."

"With what class of ladies?" asked Lady Saxondale, her lips curling with a contempt she made no endeavour to conceal.

Edmund was about to give some impudent reply when a footman entered the apartment to announce that Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow had just arrived, and had been shown into the Green Drawing-room.

"Whew!" was the prolonged sound which Lord Saxondale sent out from his lips at this intelligence: then, as the footman retired, he said, "There's not much difficulty in guessing what that old fogey and that bustling pottifogger have come here for."

"How dare you speak thus of your guardians?" exclaimed her ladyship. "You ought to treat them with respect."

"Oh, yes! fine respect indeed, when they are plotting all kinds of things against me. But perhaps—However we shall see:"—and he stopped short abruptly.

Lady Saxondale looked very hard at him evidently to fathom his meaning, which had a sort of mysterious self-sufficiency and assurance in it that for a moment troubled her:—

look of dis-

dain, as if she would not condescend to bandy any more words with one whom she certainly detested, she swept majestically out of the room.

But the keys? there they were—left upon the table! Her ladyship had forgotten them, or else had not dreamt of the necessity of taking them with her.

"Well! it was high time that I should discover my mother's secrets," muttered Saxondale to himself as he triumphantly laid hold of the keys. "Petersfield and Marlow here—oh? They no doubt think that they will dispose of me just as they choose; but perhaps they will find the difference. However, I must not delay."

Thus speaking, he hastened from the apartment—rushed up the stairs—and re-entered his mother's private chambers. The keys, of which he had possessed himself, opened the locks that had previously resisted his endeavours. He examined wardrobe, cupboard, closet, and drawers—he scrutinized the various costumes and packages contained therein: but no Spanish dress could be discovered. His investigation had lasted at least half-an-hour, and he was about to retreat from the chambers, when he observed a trunk standing in the window-recess of the wardrobe-room. He was some minutes before he could find the right key to open this trunk; but at length he succeeded—and lifting the lid, observed that it contained the more costly articles of the family plate which were not in general use, but were only brought out on grand occasions. He removed some of the articles, and at length caught sight of the object of his search at the bottom of the trunk. With an ejaculation of joy he drew forth the dress, unrolled it, and became convinced beyond the possibility of doubt that it was the same one which he had seen worn by the lady who had joined Lord Harold Staunton at the masquerade.

He was now all in a flutter of trepidation and excitement lest Lady Saxondale or any of the maid-servants should appear to interrupt his proceedings; and it was with no very great care that he placed in the trunk the massive silver articles which he had removed. This being done he locked the trunk again; and folding up the dress into as small a compass as possible, wrapped it in his handkerchief, and flew away with it to his own room. There he left it for a moment; and descending to the apartment whence

he had taken the keys, deposited them on the table where he had found them. He then sped back to his own chamber, and enveloping the dress in a large sheet of paper, fastened it with a string. Summoning his valet, he ordered the domestic to follow him with the parcel; and issuing from the house, proceeded to the nearest cabstand, where he entered a vehicle—took charge of the packet—and sent his servant back home.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Lord Saxondale returned to Evergreen Villa; and the moment Lord Harold Staunton and Emily Archer beheld him rush up the front garden with the parcel in his hand, they knew full well that his mission had been a successful one. The envelope was torn off—the dress was revealed—and Staunton at once pronounced it to be that which was worn by his masked companion at the Duke of Harcourt's ball.

"Now we have the proof!" exclaimed Saxondale, as proud and rejoiced as if he had accomplished one of the noblest and best of deeds. "You will keep your promise, Harold, and tell us all that remains to be revealed in respect to my lady-mother. For it now becomes more imperative than ever that I should have the means for defying her. Would you believe it? when I left Saxondale House she was in deep consultation with that prosy drum-drum Petersfield, and that talkative busy-body Marlow—all three of them no doubt laying their heads together to dispose of me just as it suits their good will and pleasure."

"I will keep my word and tell you everything," replied Lord Harold.

He accordingly narrated to his astonished listeners the whole of his adventures with Lady Saxondale, in respect to the scene at the masquerade—the instructions she had given him relative to Deveril—the reason he had therefore sought a duel with the young artist—and the manner in which he was treated by Lady Saxondale when he called upon her, as already described. Astonished indeed were those listeners; for they were little prepared to hear that the circumstance of the duel was in any way mixed up with the incidents of the masquerade at Harcourt House.

"It is not perhaps a very pleasant tale for a son to hear of his own mother," added Lord Harold Staunton; "and I take heaven to witness

that you never would have heard it, Edmund, if I had been treated otherwise by her ladyship. But after all the indignity I experienced at her hands you can scarcely wonder if I sought to be revenged. My vengeance is now consummated; I desire no more. I have made you acquainted, Edmund, with your mother's crime—for a crime assuredly it is that she committed, in thus seeking the death of young William Deveril. She is now in your power! You may control her and coerce her at will: she can no longer deny her identity with the heroine of the masquerade. You need not fear therefore the plots and schemings which her ladyship may have concocted with Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow. But tell me—will there be any loss of friendship between you and me in consequence of all that I've now explained to you?"

"Loss of friendship, my dear Harold!" cried Edmund, astonished at the question. "How is it possible you could think of such a thing? You had perfect right to fall in love with my mother if you chose; and I am only sorry she has used you so scurvily. As for seeking to be revenged on her by putting her in my power, the effect is to do me the greatest possible service: and therefore so far from entertaining any ill feeling towards you, I consider myself immensely your debtor. We will pass a jovial evening: Emily does not go to the Opera to-night, and we will draw a few champagne-corks before we go to bed. To-morrow I will pay another visit to my lady-mother—see what she may have to say—and then if she holds out any more threats about sending me abroad, or compelling me to live at the castle in Lincolnshire, I will let her see that I am not to be trifled with."

We need not linger over this scene, which in many respects is a painful one to describe. Let us hasten to observe that Miss Emily Archer, Lord Saxondale, and Lord Harold Staunton sat down to a delicious banquet at about six o'clock, and remained at table until a late hour. On the following day Lord Harold learnt by a paragraph in the newspaper that Mr. Deveril was now altogether out of danger; and he therefore no longer feared to return to his lodgings in Jermyn Street. He bade farewell to Miss Archer, with whom he exchanged significant looks as he thanked her for all the marks of kindness and

hospitality she had bestowed upon him at Evergreen Villa; and then he accompanied Lord Saxondale to the West End.

"I should like to know as soon as possible what takes place between yourself and your mother," he said, when they reached the point where they were to separate.

"Let us dine together this evening," answered Saxondale. "I dare say I shall have something to tell you. Emily goes to the Opera to-night—and so I am well disposed to amuse myself."

The two young noblemen accordingly settled an appointment, and then parted—the one returning to his lodgings in Jermyn Street, the other bending his way to Saxondale House.

It was a little past noon when Edmund again crossed the threshold of the stately mansion; and he was at once informed by the hall-porter that her ladyship had ordered that when he came in he was to be told she wished to see him on very important business. This was exactly what he wanted; he was desirous of bringing matters to an issue, and literally panted for an opportunity to display his power over his mother. Accordingly, without loss of time he hurried up to the apartment where she was seated. He found her alone, as on the previous day; and he saw by the cold hauteur of her looks that there was a sternly settled purpose in her mind.

"Edmund," she said, "have the goodness to sit down and let us see if we can talk quietly and peacefully together for a few minutes."

"Well, my dear lady-mother," he answered with his usual flippancy of style, as he threw himself with a languid air in a half-reclining position upon a sofa, "you can talk away as much as ever you like, and I will listen. You needn't be afraid of fatiguing me; because it suits my purpose very well to lie here for the next half-hour."

"Even at the commencement you put on this insufferable coxcombry," resumed her ladyship. "Do you really think, Edmund, that it is becoming, or calculated to inspire respect? Believe me, you only render yourself ridiculous. But it was not on this subject that I wished to speak. Are you attending?"

"With the same respect and earnestness as if it was to the fag-end of a three hours' sermon and you was the preacher. But you mustn't think I

wasn't attending because I had my eyes shut; I can always hear best like that."

"Now, Edmund," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, her cheeks flushing with anger. "I began by speaking kindly to you, and you answer me in this impudent style. You appear to think that there is something very fine in defying me: but depend upon it that you will discover your mistake. Now tell me, once for all, shall we converse as if we were on good terms with each other, or will you have me explain what I have to say in the form of commands which are to be enforced?"

"Let it be whichever way you choose," answered Edmund, with a prolonged yawn. "I dare say it will be all the same in the long run."

"If you treat the matter thus, I will without farther preface tell you what has been resolved upon by your guardians and assented to by myself:—" and as Lady Saxondale thus spoke, she drew herself up with a haughty stateliness. "The post of Attaché to the Embassy at Berlin has been placed at your disposal; and it has been accepted on your behalf by Lord Petersfield——"

"How exceedingly kind!" interjected Edmund, laughing in a subdued murmur with his cracked voice.

"In three days you will set out," continued Lady Saxondale, not appearing to play the slightest heed either to his observation or his laugh, "to undertake the duties of this honourable post which you are to fill. To-morrow her Most Gracious Majesty holds a levee, on which occasion it is the desire of myself and your guardians that you be presented to kiss the royal hands."

"The royal fiddlesticks," observed Edmund, with another laugh.

"To kiss the royal hands, I repeat," continued Lady Saxondale, accentuating her words, "on receiving this appointment. The Foreign Secretary has kindly undertaken to present you. You will therefore lose no time in making all requisite arrangements for your presentation, and also for your departure. It is proposed by your guardians that two hundred pounds a month shall be paid you by a banker at Berlin to meet your current expenses: for of course you will proceed thither and also dwell there in a style becoming your rank. These are the communications that I have to make; and I will add, Edmund, that I do

most sincerely hope you will enter with a good spirit upon the course thus marked out."

"And what if I refuse to comply with those autocratic ukases which your ladyship has been issuing?"

"I regret that you should compel me to enter into any explanation with regard to the alternatives: but if it must be so, they shall be described concisely, though firmly. Now listen:"—then after a minute's pause which her ladyship made to give solemnity to the proceeding, she said, "If you refuse to yield obedience to the wishes of your guardians and myself, it is the settled resolve of Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow to exert all the powers with which the law invests them; and those perhaps will be found to be greater and stronger than you have an idea of. In the first place it will be by a royal command that you are enjoined to proceed to Berlin in the capacity already named; and disobedience to the Queen's mandate may be followed by unpleasant consequences. In the second place, it is resolved by Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow that not another shilling shall be paid to you in the shape of allowance till you come of age, save and except under the conditions already laid down; and if you attempt to raise any money from usurers, advertisements will be inserted in the journals cautioning all such persons to beware how they deal with a minor."

"Has my dear lady-mother anything more to say?" asked Edmund, with an air of *nonchalant* indifference.

"Nothing, sir," was Lady Saxon-dale's response: and she rose from her seat as if to quit the room.

"But I have something more to say—and a good deal too," at once rejoined Edmund. "In the first place, it is not my intention to quit England at all; and therefore you had better get Lord Petersfield to undo as quickly as he can all that he may have done in respect to this embassy-business. Secondly, you will have the kindness to send for Marlow and Malton, and tell them that if they dare attempt any coercive measures with me, they shall be made to suffer for it. Thirdly, so far from stopping my allowance, you will at once get it doubled; and it will not then be necessary to put any advertisements into the newspapers, because I shall not require the assistance of usurers. Fourthly, you would do as well to have my debts paid at once, so as

to prevent the annoyance of duns coming to the house."

Lady Saxon-dale remained standing in the middle of the room while her son thus spoke; and a visible trouble came upon her—for she now saw by his manner that he did not feel himself so completely at her mercy as she wished him to be. Perhaps he had fathomed one of the many secrets which agitated in her bosom? But if so, which was it? Knowing how intimate he was with Lord Harold Staunton, it naturally occurred to her that the affair at the masquerade and the circumstances of the duel had been revealed to him.

"And pray sir," she said conquering the outward appearance of her emotions, "by whose advice are you acting: or upon what pillar are you supporting yourself, when thus coolly defying your mother—your guardians—even your Sovereign?"

"If you must know," returned Edmund, "it may be as well to put you out of all suspense at once. You need not think, my dear lady-mother, that all your tricks have escaped my knowledge. I will mention a name that perhaps may be sufficient to show you what I do know, and convince you of the prudence of leaving off your tyrannical conduct towards me."

"And that name, sir?" asked Lady Saxon-dale, nervously herself to hear it without agitation; for she full well divined what name he was about to speak.

Edmund looked with insolent hardihood in her face; and with a still more impudent kind of leer, he said boldly, "Lord Harold Staunton."

"Ah, I understand you!" cried Lady Saxon-dale, assuming a look of sovereign contempt blended with haughty indignation. "That unhappy young man has had his wits turned by the duel—"

"A duel which my dear lady-mother was the secret means of provoking."

"You dare not repeat so base a calumny, vile boy!" exclaimed her ladyship, for one moment becoming livid with rage, and then turning the colour of a peony.

"Calumny indeed?" echoed Saxon-dale; "it is the truth—and I can prove it."

"You prove it?" cried her ladyship: and her splendid dark eyes were riveted with scrutinizing intentness upon her son.

"Yes: prove it,—prove that you were the lady that I myself saw in the Spanish dress at the masquerade—prove that you wrote the letter making the appointment with Harold there—prove likewise that the name of William Dervil in another letter, or rather in a mere envelope, was penned by the same hand that wrote the first epistle! All these things can I prove as easy—"

"Edmund, is it possible that you believe the calumnies uttered by a worthless young man like Staunton, in preference to the solemn assurances of your mother?"

"Ah! but what about the dress?" cried Edmund, his countenance becoming wickedly malignant.

"The dress?" echoed her ladyship: and for an instant a suspicion of the truth flashed to her mind: but the next moment banishing it as untenable she said coldly, "I do not comprehend you."

"Then you very soon shall," rejoined Edmund: "and not to mine matters any longer, you must know that I ferreted out the beautiful Spanish dress from the great plate chest in your wardrobe room—"

"Infamous boy! reptile that I have cherished to sting me!" cried Lady Saxondale. "If you have perpetrated this atrocity, I will be avenged—I will have a terrible vengeance—a vengeance of which you little dream—But tell me, tell me quick," she said, now speaking with hysterical impetuosity, "have you told Lord Harold—"

"Told him? to be sure I have!" answered Edmund flippantly. "Why, it was at his instigation that I searched for it, while you were busied yesterday with old Petersfield and the lawyer."

"Then, Edmund, do you know what you have done?" asked Lady Saxondale, in a deep voice and with an ineffable look: "you have placed your mother's virtue in the power of an unprincipled young man—you have abandoned me to the will and pleasure of Harold Staunton."

"Then why did you put yourself into such a position?" cried Saxondale, utterly unmoved by the sudden discomfiture which he had thus produced on the part of her ladyship. "Don't you see, mother, it's all very easy to take me to task for being wild, and gay, and thoughtless, and extravagant: but you do not appear to be over-cautious yourself. You want

to get me sent from the country to keep me out of mischief: but I think that you ought to take yourself out of the reach of mischief at the same time. However, I tell you very candidly I do not want to have any words: let us come to an understanding. You must do what I want, and I will keep your secret. You have nothing to fear from Harold. He says that he is sufficiently avenged for any slight you have put upon him, by betraying you to your own son; so the thing can be hushed up quiet enough—and all I want is for you to fulfil the conditions I laid down just now."

Lady Saxondale stood gazing speechlessly upon the young man as he thus addressed her; and by the varying expression of her countenance it was evident that a flight of strange, conflicting, and painful thoughts swept through her brain. She longed to say something and do something—but which she dared not either say or do. She looked as if she had it in her power to strike a terrible blow—but that she felt she herself would be crushed by the rebound. Therefore her ideas of loftiest vengeance sank down into a feeling of bitterest hate, which was reflected in her looks as she still kept them fixed upon her son.

"You have done all this," she said, in the same low deep voice as before; "and you did not take into account all that you owe me? You had no gratitude—no love—no respect: you have dragged your mother through the mire of disgrace, and shame, and dishonour: you have exposed her to an unprincipled young man for whose keeping the secret there is no possible guarantee. All this have you done; and even now your heart is not touched—your soul is not smitten. Edmund, if I told you that I hate you, you would deserve it—and I do not know that I should be telling an untruth."

"You are uncommon candid, at all events," he replied with the utmost indifference. "I could retort a great deal; but perhaps it is not worth while. The best thing is for us to settle the matter quietly. You get Petersfield to have the appointment cancelled: tell Marlow and Malton you are highly delighted with me—that I have promised to reform—and that you believe me—or anything else you like invent: only let me be left alone, with plenty of money, my debts paid, and no more bother or non-

sense such as we have been having lately. On these conditions I keep your secret."

"And if I refuse?" said Lady Saxondale.

"Then I must declare open war. First I shall tell Juliana and Constance what a charming example of a mother they have got—"

"Enough, enough!" ejaculated the unhappy woman: "it is indeed *too* much! Edmund, you have placed me in the humiliating condition of being compelled to accede to your terms. Go then—everything you wish shall be done. But beware how you drag me down still farther into the depths of disgrace! Stop—one word more ere you depart. If to the ears of your sisters you breathe a syllable of all this, I swear that—But no matter; things must take their course."

With these words Lady Saxondale hurried from the room; and soon afterwards Edmund sallied forth to make some purchases (upon credit) for Emily Archer, ere he kept his appointment to pass the evening with Lord Harold Staunton.

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CHAPTER XLVII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.—

THE PORTRAIT.

LADY SAXONDALE retired to her own private apartments in a state of mind all the tortures and goading anguish of which can be more easily imagined than described; and going straight to the plate chest, she indeed discovered that the Spanish dress, which she had hidden with so much care, had disappeared. She sat down in the middle of the wardrobe-room; and the scalding tears trickled down her cheeks. It must have been a terrible condition of feeling which could make that proud woman weep: for even to herself, or in the solitude of her own chamber, was she ever loath to give way to what she considered the weakness of her sex. Not long however did she remain thus overpowered by the strength of her emotions, but wiping away the tears, she passed into her boudoir and there penned the following letter to her son's senior guardian:—

"My dear Lord Petersfield,
"I have just had an interview with

Edmund of so highly a satisfactory nature, that it is with feelings of the sincerest joy I am enabled to communicate the circumstance to you. I explained to him the intentions which you and Mr. Marlow had formed concerning him; whereupon he threw himself at my feet, acknowledged that he had been wild, undutiful, and extravagant—but besought and implored not only my forgiveness but that of his guardians. The idea of being separated from me and his sisters for a lengthened period, by being compelled to accept this post at Berlin, afflicted him profoundly. He declared that when travelling on the Continent for only a few months, some time ago, his thoughts were incessantly fixed upon home; and he says that however great his faults may have been, this exile into which it is proposed to send him will be far too severe a chastisement. In short, he faithfully promises a thorough and complete amendment, if his guardians and myself will accord him our pardon and give him another trial. He frankly avowed that he had contracted several debts, but with the best feeling of honour besought that they might be paid at once, so as to rescue him from the fangs of usurers.

"Under all these circumstances, my dear Lord Petersfield, I ventured to take it upon myself to promise full and complete pardon; and I am sure your lordship, in the kindness of your heart, and your friendship towards me, will sanction my proceeding. It will be easy for your lordship to procure the cancelling of the appointment, which fortunately is not yet gazetted; and as for Edmund's debts, I will send Mr. Marlow a list of them in the course of a few days, so that in the meantime you will kindly sanction their payment: for of course whatever you and I agree upon, Marlow and Malton will assent to.

"You recollect, my dear Lord Petersfield, what I hinted relative to Francis Paton: for I am fearful the great personal beauty of this youth has made some little impression upon Juliana's heart; and therefore as your lordship has testified an interest in the lad, I leave you to deal with him as you think best. I therefore send him with this note and shall tell him to wait and see if there be any answer; so that your lordship may have him into your presence and speak to him. At all events his prompt removal from Saxondale House is most

advisable; but as I yesterday hinted, this object should be accomplished in a way the least calculated to arouse Juliana's spirit and make her adopt any rash step. It is not however for me to dictate, nor scarcely even suggest any particular course to a nobleman of your lordship's profound wisdom and large experience.

"Believe me to remain, my dear Lord Petersfield,

"Your very faithful and obliged friend,

"HARRIET SAXONDALE."

Having duly sealed this letter and addressed it to the Right Honourable Lord Petersfield, Portman Square, Lady Saxondale descended to the drawing-room and rang the bell. A footman promptly answered the summons; and she bade him tell Frank to come to her immediately. The footman quitted the room; but full ten minutes elapsed without his re-appearance—so that Lady Saxondale, growing impatient, rang the bell violently once more. The footman now returned, apologizing for the delay, but assuring her ladyship that he had searched everywhere throughout the mansion for the young page, but without being able to find him; and yet it was certain that he had not gone out, for the two hats which he had in wear were hanging in their accustomed places.

"But he must have gone out, if you cannot find him in the house," said Lady Saxondale. "The moment he returns, let him be ordered to come to me."

Again the footman retired; and so soon as she was alone, Lady Saxondale felt a strange suspicion arise in her mind. Her countenance became pale as death; and starting from her seat, she proceeded at once to the apartment where her daughters were in the habit of sitting together, as stated on a former occasion. There she found Constance alone;—and in a casual manner, without appearing to have any particular object in view, she asked where Juliana was. Constance replied that her sister had a very bad headache, and had gone to lie down. Lady Saxondale bit her lip almost till the blood came: for the dire suspicion which had already entered her mind, was now strengthened. Leaving the apartment where Constance was apparently employed in reading a book, but between the leaves of which she

had thrust a letter from the Marquis of Villebelle the instant her mother had entered the room—Lady Saxondale ascended to the storey where her daughter's bed-chambers were situated. She tried the door of Juliana's room, but found it locked; and then Juliana's voice from inside asked who was there.

"It is I," responded Lady Saxondale, adopting her usual tone. "Constance tells me that you are unwell—"

"I shall be better presently, my dear mother," answered Juliana from within.

Lady Saxondale thereupon quitted the immediate vicinity of the door; but instead of descending from that storey at once, she went and concealed herself in another room and there, keeping the door ajar, watched her elder daughter's chamber. In a few minutes she saw Juliana come forth—cast a hurried look up and down the passage—and then retreat into her room again. The next instant Francis Paton issued thence and sped down stairs.

Lady Saxondale's suspicion was now thoroughly confirmed. But, oh! to what a harrowing pitch were her feelings wrought up as she thus received the unmistakable proof of her elder daughter's shame. For a few moments she stood riveted to the spot—petrified—stature-like: then in obedience to a sudden impulse, she proceeded to Juliana's chamber. The door was not locked now: she entered—and her daughter, who was in a voluptuous *deshabille*, at once turned pale and became troubled as she saw by her mother's look that everything was at least suspected, if not actually discovered. But this look of uneasiness was only momentary, and was succeeded by one of mingled indifference and hardness, as she turned aside towards the mirror and began fastening up the luxuriant masses of her glossy raven hair.

"Juliana," said Lady Saxondale, suddenly clutching her daughter violently by the arm, "you are lost—you are undone—unhappy girl that you are!"

Again for an instant did that look of trouble and shame appear upon Juliana's countenance at thus acquiring the certainty that everything was known: but it was succeeded by an expression of even bolder effrontery, as she said, "The less, mother, that we interfere with each other the better."

"Ah! are you all going to hurl de-

fidance at me?" muttered the wretched Lady Saxondale, as she thought to herself that Juliana also was acquainted with some secret which emboldened her to adopt this mien and manner of defiance: and relinquishing her hold upon the young lady's arm, she staggered back against the wall of the chamber with a feeling so dread and so inexplicable that she knew not whether she was about to faint or shriek forth in hysterical frenzy.

Juliana went on arranging her magnificent raven hair before the mirror: but still her hands trembled—there was a varying flush upon the delicate olive of her complexion, a certain restless flashing of the eyes, and a troubled heaving of the superb bust which the morning wrapper left more than half revealed. For although determined to put the boldest countenance up in her amour with the young page and to hurl all requisite defiance at her mother in asserting her own independence, yet she still was not so completely depraved as to be enabled to contemplate without emotion the detection of her shame.

"Juliana," said Lady Saxondale, speedily recovering her presence of mind—or rather, we should say, an unnatural degree of composure,—"tell me, I conjure you—tell me, unhappy girl—am I to suppose the worst—the very worst?"

"You are to suppose, mother, exactly as much as you happen to know," was the coldly insolent reply given by her daughter. "I presume you have been watching my chamber; and therefore it is useless to deny anything, even did I consider it worth while to condescend to a denial."

"Oh! this is enough to drive me mad!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, again losing all power of self-command and wringing her hands in mingled rage and anguish. "Good heavens! an intrigue with a menial—"

"Any why not I with a menial, as you contemptuously denominate him, as well as yourself with an artist?"—and as Juliana thus spoke, she bent a look of the haughtiest defiance upon her mother.

"Ah! I understand," muttered Lady Saxondale, with white and quivering lips. "I have been betrayed:"—and she alluded to Edmund, thinking that he had told his sisters everything which she had so positively enjoined him to keep secret.

"For your satisfaction and peace of

mind in one respect," said Juliana, "I can faithfully promise that no one has betrayed you; but I and Constance happened to overhear every word which took place the other day between yourself and Mr. Gunthorpe. And therefore I repeat, if a lady of quality can condescend to offer herself as the paramour of an artist, whose humble calling she affects to despise, there can be no harm in her daughter taking a leaf out of the same book."

"Juliana," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, stamping her foot upon the floor, "that I am as pure and immaculate in respect to that young man to whom you have alluded—"

"Yes, my dear mother; but it is not your own merit that you are so," responded Juliana, with a contemptuous sneer. "You must not take to yourself the credit of a virtue which you do possess: for if you did not throw yourself into William Deveril's arms, it was for the simple reason that they were not open to receive you."

Lady Saxondale sank down upon a chair like one annihilated. She felt all that was disgraceful, demoralizing, and unnatural in this scene on the part of a mother and her daughter. Her veins appeared to run with molten lead—her brain was on fire. It was a subdued frenzy that she experienced—a frenzy all the torture of which was concentrated within and testified itself in no other external wildness than the workings of her countenance. She screamed not—she did not dash herself on the floor nor against the wall; but yet for a few minutes she felt as if she were a prey to a raging madness.

Juliana the while continued to dress her hair; but she also felt that it would be an infinite relief when this scene was over, no matter how it should end.

"Juliana—my child," said Lady Saxondale, at length slowly rising from her seat, and approaching her daughter with a look so dismal, so dreary, so woe-begone that Juliana, who was not devoid of some generous feelings, was suddenly smitten with compassion for her unhappy parent,—my child, what has been done cannot be undone: but in the name of God! persevere not in a course which must end in dishonour and disgrace, O heavens! I tremble to think of the consequences!"

"Now, mother, listen," said Juliana. "I really do not seek to wound your feelings unnecessarily: I would not

have uttered a word respecting you and William Deveril, had it not been in self-defence—that is to say, to ward off the explosion of your anger against myself. This course, you must understand, was natural enough. To be frank, I love this youth, all menial though he be, with a passionate devotion. I know that I could not marry him—even as you felt that you could not marry the young artist; and I did as you would have done—”

“Enough! we must say no more upon the subject,” interrupted Lady Saxondale, again recovering her cold and unnatural state of composure. “It is too shocking! But henceforth, Juliana, how can we look each other in the face?”

“We must dissemble, my dear mother,” responded the young lady, with the assumed gaiety of an effrontery that is combined with a readiness of suggestion. “You cannot be altogether a stranger to the necessity of dissimulation, nor inexperienced in the art thereof, woman of the world as you are: and for my part, I am old enough to manage for myself. Let us go on very quietly, my dear mother,—you pursuing your own course and acting according to your own inclinations, but leaving me free to do the same. Those are the terms upon which we must henceforth live together”

Lady Saxondale was about to say more—perhaps to entreat her daughter to renounce her intrigue with the page and consent to his prompt removal from the house; but if so, a second thought must have told her that Juliana possessed a spirit impatient of dictation, and that at all events at the present moment she was in a mood to assert her independence with the boldest effrontery. Her ladyship accordingly held her peace; and turning abruptly round, quitted the room.

There is no power of language to describe the state of mind in which the unhappy mother found herself now. And well might she be so! All her children seemed not only inclined to rebel against her, but to use such rebellion as the means of securing impunity for their own vicious courses. Edmund had reduced her to submission and to his own terms, that he might continue in a career of profligacy and extravagance:—Juliana, beyond all doubt fallen from the pedestal of virtue, had likewise used coercion to prevent interference with her licentious amour:—and what hope

had the miserable mother that Constance would prove more dutiful or more virtuous? Perhaps even she was already fallen?—for Lady Saxondale was not entirely without her suspicions that her younger daughter still sustained a correspondence with the Marquis of Villebelle. Lady Saxondale dared think no more upon the subject: she endeavoured to escape from thought as one would fling off the coils of a hideous reptile, or flee from the spouse haunting one in a vision:—but the task was difficult indeed!

After having passed a quarter of an hour in her own chamber to compose her feelings as well as she possibly could, Lady Saxondale recollected her letter to Lord Petersfield, and again descended to the drawing-room. Almost immediately afterwards the door opened, and Frank Piron made his appearance. With the utmost difficulty could Lady Saxondale prevent herself ordering from her presence the youth who was the object of her daughter's love and the cause of her shame. But she saw the necessity of proceeding cautiously in whatsoever she might do; and she bade him take the letter to Lord Petersfield and wait for an answer. Frank bowed and quitted the room: but he left her while standing before her ladyship, he had looked troubled and confused. And no wonder, when we consider that he was in Juliana's own chamber at the time her mother had knocked at the door.

The young page issued from the house, and took the direction of Portman Square. As he went along he thought to himself that if he had an opportunity of speaking to Lord Petersfield alone, he would again fling himself upon his knees in that nobleman's presence, and beseech him to give him some intelligence concerning that lady whom in his earlier years he had thrice seen, who had caressed him so tenderly, and whom he so confidently believed to be his mother. On reaching Portman Square he found that Lord Petersfield was at home; and he waited in the hall while a servant took the letter to his lordship. In a few minutes the footmen reappeared bidding frank follow him.

“Then I am about to see this nobleman,” thought the page to himself, “who I feel convinced knows more concerning me than he has ever chosen to admit. Surely that letter of which

I was the bearer, could not regard myself?"

But the youth had no farther time for reflection; for he now found himself upon the threshold of the apartment where Lord Petersfield was seated. He entered—the door closed behind him—and he was now alone with that nobleman.

"Francis Piton," said the cautious and solemn diplomatist, "it may be that you are somewhat surprised at being called into my presence? I do not say that you are—and I do not wish you to reply without previous reflection. Take time—"

"My lord, I am not altogether surprised," responded the young page; "because I cannot divest myself of the belief that your lordship is the depositor of some secret respecting myself and my sister. And Oh! if it be to tell me anything on that point—"

"You must not speak so rapidly," interrupted Lord Petersfield, with even a degree of sternness: but almost immediately wearing a milder aspect, he said, "Neither must you assume any such opinion as that which you have so rashly, so precipitately, and I may even say so unadvisedly put forward. Young man, I wish to know—but do not answer hurriedly—I never like taking people unawares—I wish to know, I say, whether you are so well contented with your present position that you would be unwilling to change it? But understand me thoroughly. I may, suppose that I could procure you a better one. But let me explain what I mean by the word *better* in this sense; because there never should be any mistake as to the real application of terms. *Better* signifies—then—it signifies better: that is to say, better in point of standing and better in point of salary. You receive a good education—I think I am justified in presuming that you are clever: but mind, I do not wish you to answer in the affirmative without having well considered the question whether, you are clever or not. I may however add that if sufficiently clever, I think I can venture so far as to promise you a clerkship in a government office—"

At this moment the footman returned to the room, to announce that the Duke of Harcourt had just called and desired an interview with his lordship.

The cautious diplomatist looked exceedingly grave, and appeared to reflect whether it were possible that the Duke could have any sinister motive

in view: but at length coming to the conclusion that such a result was not to be apprehended, inasmuch as his Grace was an ultra-Tory and therefore entertaining the same opinions as himself, he resolved to see the Duke at once. Bidding Francis Piton await his return, Lord Petersfield issued slowly and gravely from the room.

On thus finding himself alone, Frank listlessly—or we might say mechanically—began to turn over the leaves of one of the books which lay upon the table. The volume which he had thus happened to light upon, was of large folio size, handsomely bound, but with the binding very much faded and the leaves themselves the least thing dingy with the influence of time. The front page showed that it had been published in the year 1829, consequently about fifteen years back: it was entitled *Beauties of the Court*, and consisted merely of a number of portraits of ladies, with no descriptive letter-press whatsoever. In short, it was one of those luxuriously got up pictorial works issued to fill the publisher's pocket by gratifying the vanity of ladies in the aristocratic circles, and therefore only fitted to lie upon a drawing-room table.

The young page's thoughts were far away from this volume the leaves of which he was turning over: but still as Lord Petersfield continued absent, he went on looking at plate after plate—and as the engravings were most superbly executed and formed specimens of the very highest style of the art, it was no wonder if Frank, who possessed a refined taste notwithstanding his menial position, proceeded with the inspection.

He had turned over upwards of a dozen pages, and had contemplated the countenances of the most beauteous peeresses and the loveliest daughters of the aristocracy, when he suddenly lighted upon one which caused him to start suddenly as if galvanized with a powerful electric force, while an ejaculation of mingled wonderment and joy burst from his lips. Then, quick as lightning, did his eye glance to the foot of the plate to learn the name of her whose well-known and beauteous features were represented there: but indescribable was his disappointment on beholding naught save this inscription—"A PORTRAIT."

A portrait! yes indeed; and one which he had not failed to recognise.

—but a portrait of whom? Hurriedly did he turn over leaf after leaf of that book in the hope of discovering some descriptive letter-press: but there was none. He looked to the index to see whether it should happen to mention the original of that portrait: but it did not. The pang of disappointment was however mitigated by the pleasure of contemplating that transcendingly beauteous countenance, of which his memory had since his boyhood retained so faithful an impress: for the reader will not have forgotten those words which the young page had so feelingly addressed to the Hon. Miss Juliana Farefield.

“Even,” he had said, “if I had never seen that lady but once—and even if it were only on the first occasion when I was but six years old—her image would have remained indelibly impressed upon my mind. But recollect, Miss Farefield, that on two subsequent occasions did I behold that lady at about a year’s interval each time, and that on the last occasion I was eight years old. At this age the mind is callous and insensible to many things, but equally susceptible and sensitive in other things. Amidst the Alpine forests there is a tree which if, when a tender sapling, a name be engraved upon it, will, as it grows with the progress of years, retain the inscription thus made; and while increasing in bulk and height, it still preserves the name indented upon its rind—and the larger it becomes, the deeper, the wider, and the more palpable grows the inscription also. So it is with certain images which are engraven upon the youthful heart. The human sapling grows up to man’s estate, and time, instead of obliterating the inscription, deepens it, makes it spread over a wilder space of the heart, and allows it not to be effaced.”

But let us pause for a moment to describe this portrait in the volume of illustrations on which Frank Paton’s eyes were so intently riveted. The lady had a countenance of a perfect oval shape, with a forehead of noble height; and the beautiful face was framed as it were with a cloud of raven tresses which showered upon her shoulders and upon her back. A single white rose adorned that hair of luxuriant magnificence. Her brows were darkly pencilled, but yet with delicacy—that is to say, not with thickness: her eyes were dark, and seemed full of lustre even in the print. The nose was nearly straight, with a

scarcely perceptible elevation in the classic outline; the mouth was small, the under lip appearing slightly full, but not pouting and very far from coarse. The expression of her countenance was pleasing and affable, but mingled with the conscious dignity of rank—perhaps also of being the cynosure of admiration. She was dressed in evening costume, the low-bodiced dress revealing shoulders splendidly sloped and allowing a slight glimpse of a fine bust. Her arms appeared to be well rounded even to robustness, but perfectly symmetrical; and the portrait altogether give the impression of a fine handsomely-made woman, the voluptuousness of her shape being subdued into gracefulness and elegance. The engraving was surrounded by a tasteful border of tendrils and leaves, and was decidedly the most beautiful specimen of the art in that volume. We should add that the lady who served as the original of this portrait, must have been about thirty years of age at the time the likeness was taken,—which, judging from the title-page of the book, was in the year 1829.

“It was in 1834 that I last saw her whom I believe to be my mother,” thought Frank within himself, as his eyes remained riveted upon the picture. “Then according to the best of the conception which at that age I could form, she appeared to me about five or six-and-thirty. Yes—she did look some few years older than in this portrait—but not many; and considering the dates,” he added referring to the title-page to mark the year again, “it is undoubtedly the same. Oh! not for an instant can I be mistaken. And she was a beauty of the Court? Here is the confirmation of another idea which I entertained, that she was connected with the Court. But wherefore is her name not given in this book? Oh! if thou art, as I believe thee to be, the reflex of my mother’s countenance, let me kiss thee here, as I have embraced the original!”

And bending down, the youthful page pressed his lips upon the cold inanimate portrait, and a tear-drop fell from his eyes thereon. At this moment he heard footsteps approaching the door; and hastily raising his head, he passed his handkerchief across his eyes. Lord Petersfield re-entered the room; and at once perceiving the open book he rushed to

the table in a manner totally at variance with the usual gravity of his movements.

"My lord, that portrait," exclaimed Francis Paton, "is one which I immediately recognized. Tell me, my lord—tell me, I conjure you—was not this lady my mother?"

"Young man, I—I—am not accustomed to have such home-thrust questions put to me. But wherefore should you address such a question to me at all?" asked the nobleman, who in a moment had regained his wonted composure and self-possession. "How long will you cherish this delusion that I am in any way connected with you of your private affairs?"

"My lord, you must excuse me for saying that I can believe my own eyes. You see that my memory is good—that I at once recognised this portrait. It is ten years since you took me to the school at Southampton, and I was not then too young to have your lordship's image impressed upon my mind, nor is the date so remote that in the interval your lordship has changed to a degree to defy recognition."

"Nevertheless you are mistaken," rejoined Petersfield, with mingled coldness and compassion,—a coldness of tone and yet a certain sympathy in the look. "Now let us return to the subject whereupon we were talking before I left the room. I pressure that you have had leisure to reflect upon my proposition? But don't answer too hurriedly—take time—never commit yourself; the most terrible calamities have arisen to man and to nations from hasty and unreflected speech."

"I thank your lordship," answered the youth, with even a kind of petulance, "but I cannot devote my thoughts to mere worldly matters now. All my ideas are centered in this portrait. Will your lordship make me a present of the book? I know that the request is a very bold one; but under circumstances I hope your lordship will excuse it. No, matter, however, if you cling, my lord, to the book—I will hasten and purchase a copy."

Thus speaking, Frank Paton again glanced to the title-page, and took note of the publisher's name and address. Lord Petersfield for an instant looked annoyed; but the next moment resuming that diplomatic gravity which served him as a mask, he said, "A government situation of

about a hundred and fifty pounds a year is something that no youth of your age and in your position should refuse to accept. That is to say," he added, as if afraid of being caught in the act of recommending precipitation for once in his life, "having duly considered its eligibility. I do not think that I transgress the bounds of propriety and prudence—certainly not those of the truth—when I state that I experience some degree of interest in you, and will endeavour to help you on in the world."

"My lord, at this present moment," returned Frank, "I can decide upon nothing. It is clear that you will give me no information upon the point most vitally interesting to myself; and therefore I need intrude on your lordship no longer."

Then, without waiting to ask if there were any letter or message to take back to Lady Sixondale,—without even recollecting upon what errand he had come,—the young page hurried from the room, rapidly descended the stairs, and issuing from the house, continued his way with the same precipitation towards the street indicated on the title-page of the book as that where its publisher resided. Oh! to possess the portrait of her whom he believed to be his mother and whose image his mind treasured up,—that would at least be a mitigation of the sorrow he too often experienced when pondering upon the mystery that enveloped his parentage!

The street was not above half an hour's walk from Portman Square for a person proceeding leisurely and deliberately: but Frank, who ran the whole way, accomplished the distance in half the time; and so breathless was he on entering the shop, that he could not immediately give utterance to the words that trembled on the tip of his tongue. At length he stated what we required.

"I have not a copy of that book left," replied the publisher. "In fact the whole impression was subscribed for before issued; and I do not think that if you were to offer a hundred guineas you could procure a single copy. They all found their way into the hands of persons by no means likely to part with them."

Here was a disappointment. But suddenly an idea struck the youth,—an idea which in the hurry and excitement of his rapid run had not occurred to him before. The publisher

most likely knew who was the original of the engraving simply described as "A Portrait;" and in vehement haste did Frank put the question.

"You seem, young man," said the bookseller, to be strangely excited. "Is it for yourself, or for the family in whose service you are, that you want the book?"

"No matter," replied Frank. "Do pray answer my question—who was the original of the picture described as *A Portrait*?"

"Well, I do recollect that there was one so described; and I believe it was simply because the lady herself had not enough vanity to wish her name to be paraded. But I can't for the life of me recollect who she was. I entrusted the getting-up of the book to the eminent engraver who undertook the plates; and he borrowed the original pictures from the ladies themselves to make his designs from them. I left it all in his hands, and do not recollect anything more about that portrait you speak of."

"But the engraver—where does he live?"

"He is dead," replied the bookseller.

"Dead!" echoed Frank,沉思 with the despondency of renewed disappointment. "There seems to be a fatality about this. Have you not a single copy even for your own private use?"

"I am confident I have not," replied the publisher. "It was but the other day I was regretting to my wife that we had not saved one for ourselves—but such is the fact, I can assure you."

Francis lingered to ask a few more questions in the hope of discovering some means of gratifying his wishes; but nothing favourable transpired. He accordingly issued from the shop with a slowness of pace very different from the excitement with which he had entered it. He was bending his way mournfully homeward, pondering upon all that had taken place and inwardly wishing that he had torn out the portrait from the book ere Lord Petersfield returned to the room—when he suddenly heard a female voice exclaim, "Frank! Good God, is it possible? Yes—it is—it is—he is alive!"

That voice, even before the young man raised his eyes, touched a chord vibrated to the depths of his heart. Glancing up, he beheld his

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE BROTHER AND SISTER.

IT was in the middle of a somewhat secluded street that this sudden and most unexpected encounter took place; but had it been in the middle of Regent Street or any other of the most crowded thoroughfares of London, the brother and sister would have thrown themselves into each other's arms as they did then and there. The few passers-by at that time were naturally struck by beholding a very well dressed lady of exceedingly handsome appearance (for such the sister was) thus suddenly fold a livery-page in her arms; but the ejaculations which escaped their lips, explained the close kinship existing between them.

"Oh, my long-lost sister!" cried Frank in the wildness of his wild joy.

"Dearest, dearest brother!" exclaimed the lady in accents of gushing enthusiasm: "it is indeed you—and you are alive! Thank God, thank God!"

Full evident indeed was it that both for the moment forgot that it was the open street and the broad daylight of a summer afternoon that they thus met. Expressions of sympathy were uttered around them by those who had paused to witness this affecting scene; and a shopkeeper standing on the threshold of his establishment, in face of which the occurrence took place, considerably stepped forward and with much kindness of manner invited the brother and sister to walk into his house. They at once accepted the proposition; and the worthy tradesman, having conducted them upstairs, to a neatly furnished apartment, left them there.

The brother and sister being thus alone, and free from observation, embraced again and again; and when the first excitement of feelings attendant upon this meeting was over, they naturally began to ask each other a thousand questions, so that neither for the first few moments could give any replies. It was a perfect torrent of tender and affectionate queries—but no answers.

"My dear Frank," said his sister, at length laughing at the confusion into which the very ecstasy of their emotion plunged them, "we shall never get on at this rate. You must answer me first. Whose livery do you wear?"

—and her looks became suddenly disdainful as she spoke: not disdainful of her brother—for him she caressed fondly at the same time; but disdainful in respect to that garb of servitude.

“I am at Lady Saxondale’s,” he replied.

“Lady Saxondale’s!” she echoed, with something like a sudden start, and even a changing of the colour on her truly handsome countenance.

“Yes. Do you know her?” cried Frank, perceiving those evidences of emotion.

“No: but the name is familiar to me,” returned his sister. “Dear Frank, I am so rejoiced—so ineffably rejoiced to see you—you know not how much!”

“And now tell me, dear Elizabeth,” quickly resumed Frank, “why for the last four or five years you have not written to me? why have I never heard from you?”

“Why, my dear brother?” she exclaimed, now becoming red with indignation, and her eyes flashing fire. “Oh, why?—because I was given to understand that you were dead. Ah! my dear brother, you know not how bitterly, bitterly I wept for your supposed loss! It was treachery of the foulest description: but I can fathom it all—yes, all! Heaven be thanked that you are alive! I could scarcely believe my eyes when they fell upon you—and yet I knew you in an instant!”

“But you spoke of treachery, dear sister,” said Frank, in astonishment. “Who behaved treacherously? What is it that you can fathom?”

“The story is much too long to tell you now, dear boy,” she replied, speaking with a sort of maternal air at the moment: for, as the reader has been informed, she was nearly eight years older than her brother. “Besides I am now somewhat pressed for time, and must hasten elsewhere. To-morrow, my dear Frank, you shall come to me: and that,” she added emphatically, ‘shall be the last time you wear this badge of servitude. Tell me, dearest Frank, have you been happy? But I am afraid to ask the question: for when I met you just now, you seemed to be absorbed in profound and melancholy thought.”

“I cannot say, dear sister, that I have been altogether happy. I have been much troubled by your unaccountable silence: but that source of grief is now, thank heaven, removed. Oh! I am so delighted to behold you

again, and to see by your appearance that your circumstance must be good. But tell me, dear Elizabeth, have you obtained any clue to—”

“The reading of past mysteries?” said his sister, anticipating the question. “No—not the slightest. And you, Frank?”

“Upon that subject I was pondering when your voice—your dear voice, so quickly recognized—fell upon my ear.”

“Had anything new occurred to plunge you thus into such deep abstraction?”

“Oh yes! I will tell you. You remember,” continued Frank, “that when I joined you at the school at Southampton—that was upwards of ten years ago—I told you how I had been taken to a strange-looking red brick building, where I saw that lady again, and where a nobleman with a star upon his breast spoke to Mrs. Burnaby? Well, I have since found out that the red brick building was St. Jame’s Palace.”

“Ah!” ejaculated Elizabeth: “was it so? Then she whom we believe to be our mother, was connected with the Court?”

“Listen,” resumed Frank. “You remember that the same nobleman with a star upon his breast was the one who took me to see that lady at the beautiful country-house the last time I ever did see her—and he then conducted me to the school at Southampton. You remember I told you all this, Elizabeth?”

“Certainly. How could I forget it? But go on, dear Frank—go on.”

“Well, that nobleman is, I am convinced, Lord Peterfield—although his lordship denies it.”

Frank then proceeded to acquaint his sister with the rest of those particulars which are known to the reader,—how he was mysteriously provided with the situation of a page at Buckingham Palace—how he had there recognized the two ladies whom he had formerly seen in company with the one whom he believed to be his mother, but how they had denied any knowledge of him. Then he described how he had accosted Lord Petersfield at the palace—how his lordship had likewise denied all the antecedent circumstances—and how through his lordship’s aid Frank had obtained the situation at Saxondale House after his summary though not ignominious dismissal from the palace. Finally,

Francis Paton told his sister all those particulars relative to the portrait in the *Court Beauties* which have just been described.

"It is of the highest importance to procure that portrait," said Elizabeth, who had listened with the deepest attention and most absorbing interest to her mother's narrative. "It will be certain to afford us a clue to the discovery who the lady was: and if once we ascertain that point, we may follow up the investigation so as to arrive at the truth whether we indeed have any right to regard her as our parent. You say that the publisher gave you no hope of obtaining a copy, and that Lord Petersfield showed no inclination to give you his own? Well, we shall see? You will come to me to-morrow, Frank; and perhaps I may be enabled to show you the portrait then. Oh! my dear boy, you need not look so surprised; depend upon it I will do my best to obtain one. And now I repeat, you must come to me to-morrow. Let it be in the afternoon—and with or without Lady Saxondale's permission, it matters not; for you shall return to her no more. But now I am going to astonish you somewhat. When you come to me to-morrow, you will find yourself in the home of your childhood—"

"What! is it possible?" cried Frank. "I am indeed amazed, but still more rejoiced. How happened it?"

"Simply that the cottage was to let and I took it some time back. But perhaps you have never seen it since you quitted it when eight years old?"

"I had altogether forgotten where it was: but it will give me unspeakable pleasure to behold it again to-morrow."

His sister now gave him her card; and as he glanced upon it, he cried with a new outburst of astonishment, "Then you are married, dear Elizabeth! And your husband?"

"I am separated from him. But look not so suddenly grave, dear Frank; it was through no fault of mine. However, we have not time to converse any longer now. We must separate. Embrace me, dear brother. I shall long for to-morrow afternoon to come, that we may be re-united."

They kissed each other affectionately, and then took their departure—but not before they had expressed their thanks to the worthy tradesman who had so kindly and considerately invited them into his house.

The reader will have observed that Frank Paton said nothing to his sister about his amour with Juliana Farefield. In the first place it was not a subject on which a mere youth, still timid and bashful from no very large experience of the world, was likely to touch upon in the presence of an elder sister: and secondly, even if in confidential ingenuousness he had been so disposed, there was not time in the hurry of discourse and excitement of feelings attendant upon that first encounter after a separation of six long years. While however he was returning home to Saxondale House, the image of Juliana Farefield crept into his mind; and though on the one hand he was rejoiced at the prospect of thenceforth living with his sister, who by her appearance seemed to be in very comfortable circumstances,—yet on the other hand he experienced a saddening sensation at the idea of being separated from Lady Saxondale's daughter. For he loved Juliana with an enthusiastic devotion,—loved her not only for her splendid beauty, but likewise with a feeling of gratitude that she should have learnt to love him, a humble page! He loved her too, because she had recognized in him a gentility above his social position—had delicately complimented him on his intellectual requirements—and had done all she could to make him feel that he ought not to be humble, and obscure, and menial as she was. He therefore felt that by this love of hers he had been in some sense elevated from his lowly station; and as her impassioned endearments had been lavished upon him precisely as if he were her equal in all respects, he experienced a degree of devotion towards her which now rendered it painful to contemplate a separation.

While thus giving way to his reflections, Frank Paton reached Saxondale House; and then for the first time he bethought himself that he had not asked Lord Petersfield if he had any letter or message to send back. Not knowing exactly what answer to give her ladyship if questioned on the subject, Frank thought that the best plan would be not to signify his return at all: but scarcely had he made up his mind to this course, when one of the footmen told him that her ladyship's instructions were that the instant he returned he was to go up to her.

Frank accordingly ascended to the drawing-room, where her ladyship was seated; and he could not help think

ing, by the earnest manner in which she fixed her eyes upon him, that she suspected a secret understanding had subsisted between himself and Juliana. For not actually knowing what had occurred after he had left Juliana's room, he had no precise information on the subject—nothing beyond mere conjecture and apprehension.

"Have you brought back any letter or message?" asked Lady Saxondale.

"None, my lady," responded Frank.

"Then what has made you so long? Surely his lordship could not have detained you all this time?"

"His lordship detained me a considerable time, please your ladyship, as the Duke of Harcourt called in Portman Square while I was waiting."

"But you have been nearly three hours absent," continued Lady Saxondale, regarding her watch. "Surely the Duke of Harcourt did not pay a visit of such length as to account for so much time. I suppose that Lord Petersfield himself kept you in conversation. Indeed, I know that his lordship is somewhat interested in you, on account of your orphan condition and your extreme youth. What did his lordship say?"—and Lady Saxondale put the question point blank.

"His lordship," returned Frank, "kindly stated that he would procure me a Government situation?"

"And of course you agreed to accept it? Why do you hesitate to answer me? You surely cannot be so blind to your own interests as to refuse such an eligible offer? Besides, a proposal coming from a great nobleman like Lord Petersfield, amounts to a command; and such a command is to be obeyed by one in your position. Still you remain silent? What is the meaning of this? If you have not given his lordship a decisive answer, you should do so at once."

"Please your ladyship," said Frank, at length breaking silence, "there is some one whom I must consult before I can pledge myself to a particular course. But I hope that I shall not be thought ungrateful for any intended kindness on his lordship's part, because I act deliberately."

"And pray whom must you consult?" asked Lady Saxondale, for the moment struck with the idea that he was thinking Juliana; and the crimson glow of indignation rushed to her cheeks at the bare thought that he was thus hardly enough to allude to the young lady in her own mother's presence.

"Please your ladyship," answered Frank, "I have this day met my sister, whom I had not seen for a long time —"

"Your sister?" interrupted Lady Saxondale. "I did not know that you had any relations."

"Yes, my lady: I have a sister—and I met her just now. To tell the truth, it was because I remained conversing with her that I have been so long absent. She wishes me to leave your ladyship's service and go to her to-morrow, as she is herself comfortably off."

"And pray who is your sister?" asked Lady Saxondale.

"Here is her card," replied Frank, "with her name and address:"—and anticipating not the slightest harm in producing it, he handed the card to his mistress.

Lady Saxondale took it: but the instant her eyes fell upon it, she gave vent to an ejaculation of astonishment, and her look became indescribably strange, with a blending of malignant mockery, scorn, contempt, and triumph. Frank felt frightened, and knew not what to think.

"And this person—this woman," said Lady Saxondale, with assests of bitter irony as she pointed to the card, "is your sister?"

"She is, my lady," responded the young page, fixing his fine large hazel eyes upon his mistress in a terrified manner.

"Then listen, Francis Paton," continued Lady Saxondale, now speaking in a low deep voice and with a look that was nearly inscrutable. "This woman whom you claim as your sister—to whom you are to return to-morrow—and whom you must consult ere accepting his lordship's proffer, is a female highwayman!"

Frank gave vent to a wild cry—almost amounting to a shriek—as this crushing announcement met his ears: but the next instant rejecting with horror the possibility of belief in such an allegation, he said angrily and proudly, "Your ladyship is mistaken: it cannot be!"

At this moment the door was thrown open, and the footman announced Mr. Marlow. Thereupon Frank was about to withdraw; but Lady Saxondale beckoned him to remain; then turning quickly to the lawyer, she said, "I think I am not mistaken, Mr. Marlow,

in my belief that the female whose name and address are upon this card, is the same who, disguised in man's apparel, stopped you and Mr. Malton?"

"The very same!" ejaculated the volatile lawyer, as he half snatched the card from Lady Saxondale's hand. "Mrs. Chandos, to be sure! She is a most extraordinary woman—possesses the effrontery of old Nick himself—regularly beat me at Dover. I can't conceive how it was done! that's a mystery I would give a thousand pounds to have cleared up. Did your ladyship ever happen to read the examination at the Town Hall at Dover? It never got into the London papers, but was reported at full length in the *Dover Chronicle*. I cut the slip out—and here it is."

While thus rattling on in his usual style, Mr. Marlow took out his pocket-book—turned over a quantity of papers—and selecting the slip he alluded to was handing it to Lady Saxondale, when Frank, with a sort of cry of rage and despair, darted forward, snatched it from the astounded attorney, and hurrying to the farther extremity of the room, greedily and anxiously ran his eyes over the printed report. It gave with singular minuteness and accuracy such a description of the Mrs. Chandos therein mentioned, that the young page could not possibly fail to recognize his sister. His cheeks became the colour of marble—his lips grew white and quivering—and overpowered with anguish, he sank upon a seat. But still he read on. Then rapidly did a change take place in him—the colour came back to his countenance, with even the deepening glow of exultation—his eyes sparkled—and the whole expression of his truly handsome countenance was that of an enthusiastic joy.

"You see, sir," he exclaimed, suddenly starting from the chair, "that this Mrs. Chandos whom you caused to be arrested at Dover, triumphantly refuted your allegation, proved that you were wrong, and was honourably dismissed by the Mayor."

Meanwhile Lady Saxondale had in a hurried whisper explained to Mr. Marlow that the young page was none other than a brother of the female highwayman,—which explanation was indeed necessary to account for that extraordinary conduct of a livery-page who had thus dared, with so much excitement, to snatch up a paper which was being handed to his mistress.

"Ah!" said Mr. Marlow, "it looks all very fine in the report—and certainly the case was mysterious enough. But when I tell you that—though I have really no means of proving it after all that took place at Dover—I am as firmly convinced of the identity—But I do not wish to hurt your feelings, young man: indeed I am sorry for you. For notwithstanding the rudeness you have just shown—which excitement was however perhaps natural enough under the circumstances—I have always taken you for a nice and well behaved lad.

The expression of joy and exultation gradually faded away from Frank's countenance, and was succeeded by a look of painful bewilderment. The lawyer was so positive that the poor youth knew not what to think. He longed to vindicate his sister's good fame by flinging the lie at the attorney: but some secret feeling, vague and undefinable, withheld him.

"Now listen, Francis Paton," said Lady Saxondale, assuming an air and a voice of mingled compassion and seriousness. "Your own good sense must tell you that I cannot any longer keep beneath my roof a young man of such deplorable connexions: but at the same time I feel all the injustice of visiting upon you the misdeeds of your sister. You must leave: but the reason need not be known. I will not expose you: your secret shall not pass my lips—and I will answer for Mr. Marlow. But the condition of such forbearance is that you take your hat and quit the house at once, without pausing to communicate with a single soul. You must not even so much as ascend to your own room to change your garments or fetch your clothes. All that belongs to you shall be sent by the carrier to your sister's house to-morrow; and as for that suit of my livery which you have on, you need not trouble yourself about it. Now, do you understand me? and do you promise obedience to these conditions? Otherwise you will force me to expose you before the entire household."

The poor youth was overwhelmed with mingled consternation and bewilderment, as Lady Saxondale addressed him in these terms. Her look and her manner gave to the whole affair a portentous magnitude but too well calculated to produce such an astounding effect upon the unhappy Frank Paton. His senses seemed to be lost in the crushing influence that

thus came upon him like a spell. For a moment he sought to raise his voice to vindicate his sister: but the words he would have uttered, died upon his lips. He felt as if he were standing at the bar of a tribunal competent to judge, and that its doom must be regarded as condemnatory of his sister's reputation as well as fearful in its effect upon himself.

"Her ladyship," said Mr. Marlow, "has really no other course to adopt: and you would do well, young man," he added in a compassionating tone, "to follow her suggestions at once."

Frank dared not disobey: the spell which was upon him was stronger than himself; and the dread of the threatened exposure sat upon his soul with a stupendous horror. Throwing one dismal dreary look of despair upon Lady Saxondale and Mr. Marlow, he slowly dragged himself from the room.

In the landing outside he met Juliana Farefield.

"Dear Frank," she said, in a low quick whisper, as she caught him by the hand, "what in heaven's name has taken place?"

But the unhappy youth, not daring to tell the object of his heart's devotion—the proud patrician Juliana—what *had* transpired, flung upon her a glance of ineffable anguish; and murmuring, "No, no!" broke abruptly from her and rushed down stairs.

Seizing his hat, which he had left in the hall, he quitted the house, and wandered rapidly away without noticing the direction he was taking and without any settled purpose in view.

Juliana remained transfixed with astonishment upon the landing. Her first feeling was one of rage and indignation against her youthful lover, who she thought had perhaps been either persuaded or brought over by her mother to break off all future connexion with her: but as she recovered the power of calmer reflection, Juliana's shrewd and experienced mind told her that this was not the case. There had been too much anguish in the look which Francis had flung upon her—too bitter a lamentation in the accents of his voice as he murmured those words when breaking away from her—and too evident a despair in that frantic movement itself, to warrant the belief that he had yielded to either persuasion or gold in consenting to renounce her.

"These are some devilish arts of my mother," said Juliana to herself: and

she at once proceeded into the drawing room. But perceiving Mr. Marlow there, she instantaneously composed her countenance; and saying, "I beg your pardon: I did not know that you were engaged;" she abruptly quitted the apartment again.

Lady Saxondale immediately came out after her, having requested Mr. Marlow to excuse her for a moment: and catching Juliana by the arm, she drew her into another room, saying, "You evidently wish to speak to me?"

"Yes, mother—I do," responded the elder daughter, a strange and sinister light burning in her dark eyes, and an equally ominous expression appearing upon her countenance.

"I will not pretend to be ignorant of what is uppermost in your thoughts," said Lady Saxondale, having carefully closed the door. "You must have seen Francis Paton quit the drawing room in despair: you know perhaps that he has left the house for ever."

"Ah! he has left the house for ever?" repeated Juliana, with a singularly cold and resolute air. "Then I also shall quit the house for ever:"—and she moved towards the door.

"Do so," said Lady Saxondale, assuming a demeanour and a tone as glacial as her daughter's. "But you will perhaps do well to hear first why it is that Francis Paton has quitted the house."

"You need not tell me why," answered Juliana, turning round and stopping to confront her mother. "I have learnt more of your character and more of your disposition within the last week or two, than during whole years I had learnt before; and one of my experiences is that if you have a purpose to gain, you are unscrupulous in the means you employ to reach it. Without precisely knowing what you have said or done to Francis Paton, I am at no loss to conceive that your diabolic ingenuity has invented something to banish him from the house. Perhaps you have worked upon his fears—"

"And perhaps," interrupted Lady Saxondale, still coldly as before, "the circumstances of his own position have furnished but too just an opportunity for such a course. Listen, Juliana. Francis Paton has this afternoon met his sister—"

"Well, I knew that he had a sister whom he had not seen nor heard of for four or five years."

"It may be so—or it may not," resumed Lady Saxondale. "But certain it is that this sister is none other than the female highwayman who stopped Marlow and Malton—the famous Mrs. Chandos of the Dover adventure which yourself have laughed at so heartily when bantering the attorneys at being so egregiously outwitted."

Juliana became pale as death, and even staggered visibly at this announcement: but making a desperate effort to recover herself, and clutching at a straw of hope, she said in a hoarse voice, "This, mother, is some specious trickery of yours."

"No, Juliana, the facts are against such a belief on your part, or such a proceeding on mine. The boy produced his sister's card—and here it is. Behold the name of Mrs. Chandos! See also the address in the corner; it is the same place to which the lawyers were conducted by the female highwayman in the first instance, and whence she escaped by the window. Then Marlow gave the boy this report from a provincial paper to read; and it was clear that he recognized but too well the description of his sister. If you still doubt me, go into the drawing-room and ask Marlow himself."

Juliana saw no necessity for doing this: it was but too evident that her mother was retailing facts and had the game in her own hand. Still she felt the haughtiest disinclination to be beaten, and accordingly said, "The sister may be a bad woman: but Frank himself is untainted by her evil courses."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, with an ironical smile and a contemptuous toss of her head; "if you like to acknowledge the brother of a highwaywoman as your lover, be it so. I cannot restrain your. Our compact is not to interfere with each other: but you cannot certainly be so unreasonable as to expect I should keep the near relative of that female desperado a moment longer beneath this roof. Why, we should not be safe," continued Lady Saxondale, with an affection or horror which, by appearing to include poor Frank in its apprehension, made every word she uttered a dagger to plunge deep down into Juliana's heart. "Who knows what influence the dreadful woman—this highway-robbert—this prowling thief—this midnight bandit of feminine sex but masculine raiment,—who knows, I ask, what influence she might sooner or

later obtain over him, even to be able to persuade him, if he remained beneath our roof, to admit herself and the gang with whom she is no doubt connected, into the house by night? We might all of us be murdered in our beds—"

"Enough, mother!" said Juliana, in a voice which, as well as her look, showed the utter abasement of a proud spirit. "You have succeeded in turning this strange discovery to your own purposes; you have triumphed over me for the present. But my turn may perhaps come."

"Your turn. Juliana?—what do you mean?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, pretending to be astonished at the implied threat. "What rancour can you possibly entertain against me on account of this most untoward discovery?"

"Because, mother," replied the daughter, the words hissing between her set teeth as if they came from the tongue of a serpent,—"because, mother, you are gloating over my discomfiture! Yes—in you secret soul—beneath that air of ingenuous wonderment which you have just put on—you exult in the sense of despair and shame which I now experience. But beware, mother—beware, I repeat—it may some day be my turn to exult and to triumph!"

With these words Juliana Farefield quitted the room; and Lady Saxondale muttered to herself, "Ah! you may threaten, proud spirit! but in the meantime I have triumphed: for I have succeeded in creating an eternal barrier between you and your plebeian lover! Little do I understand your haughty character if I may not comfort myself with the conviction that you will not seek after him again."

With this exultation inspiring her thoughts, Lady Saxondale returned into the drawing-room to transact her business with Mr. Marlow.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE DIPLOMATIST MYSTIFIED.

THE reader is now perfectly aware that Frank Paton's sister was none other than Lady Bess; and therefore we need endeavour to sustain no far-

ther secrecy on that head. After parting from her brother in the manner already described, she hesitated for a few moments whether she should proceed on some business which she had in hand at the time she met him—or whether she should carry into effect a project which had just been suggested by certain things she had heard from Frank's lips. She decided on the latter course, and repaired accordingly to Lord Petersfield's residence in Portman Square. To her satisfaction she learnt that his lordship was at home; and on being asked by the footman who opened the door what name he should announce, she replied that being a total stranger to his lordship it was needless to mention any name at all. The footman hesitated for a moment, well aware that his cautious and suspicious master would not be over well pleased to receive a person refusing to give a name: but looking a second time at the visitress, and observing that she was a well-dressed lady, of handsome, elegant, and almost fashionable appearance, he resolved to run the risk, and requested her to walk in.

Lady Bess was conducted up-stairs to the apartment where his lordship was at the time; and he rose from the chair in which he was seated at the table. He looked grave and serious—more solemn indeed than usual: for he had not failed to observe the omission in respect to the announcement of the lady's name. He however bowed with a sort of reserved politeness and indicated a chair.

"I believe," said Lady Bess, as she took the seat, "that I have the honour of addressing Lord Petersfield?"

"I—I do not know—that is, I cannot exactly say," responded the wary diplomatist, fearful of compromising himself by an unguarded answer. "To tell you the truth, I am not accustomed to have such exceeding home-questions put to me all in a moment—and by a lady who, pardon my saying so, has not as yet announced her own name."

"At all events, I take it for granted," Lady Bess immediately observed, "that I am addressing Lord Petersfield. Perhaps I may experience a little confusion on finding myself in the presence of one who has conducted the diplomatic affairs of this country with so much success at the principal European Courts on several occasions:—"and as she spoke, she be-

stowed her sweetest smile upon the old peer, as if intent upon making an impression on his heart.

"Really, ma'am," said Lord Petersfield, who had hitherto remained standing, but now slowly deposited himself back again in his arm-chair, "I know not how to receive these compliments—whether indeed I ought to receive them at all—or if receiving them, how to answer them—and if answering them, to what result our discourse may lead. Pardon me, ma'am—but you have forgotten to mention your name—"

"Your lordship must suffer yourself to be flattered," Lady Bess hastened to observe, affecting not to have noticed his last remark: "because any one who has rendered his country such great services, merits the gratitude of every individual."

"I think, ma'am," said his lordship, now looking so grave that it was utterly impossible to look graver, "that a lady who understands the merits of a cautious diplomacy as you certainly appear to do, should commence by stating at the very outset the name and business—"

"I know," interrupted Lady Bess, "that I ought to apologize for thus intruding myself upon your lordship: but so convinced was I of your lordship's urbanity, courtesy, and I might almost say chivalrous gallantry, that I felt a greater degree of confidence in calling on your lordship than under other circumstances I should have done."

"But, ma'am," interrupted the nobleman, getting bewildered—and it began to occur to him that his own ideas must be rather foggy at the moment, as he could not for the life of him discern amidst the cloud of his visitress's words what she could possibly be aiming at: "but, ma'am—ma'am—I—I—"

"You do well to interrupt me, my lord," said Lady Bess, hastening to speak again; "because I feel that my own intellect is so shallow in comparison with your lordship's, that I have possibly wandered from the subject—"

"Wandered from it, ma'am?" exclaimed Petersfield, a little impatiently; "I do not know that you have yet been near it. Pardon me if I observe, ma'am—"

"Some years ago I was in Paris," interrupted Lady Bess, starting off again at another tangent,—"and I

can assure you, my dear Lord Petersfield, that your name was quite revered in all the highest circles of Parisian society. Whenever a comparison was to be made with a great diplomatist, it was invariably the name of Lord Petersfield, which was quoted for the illustration. Therefore, my lord, such being the fact—and I being here to tell it to you—and your lordship being there to listen to it——”

“Really ma’am, I must again beg your pardon,” interrupted the nobleman, now beginning to fancy that it was a mad lady who had obtained access to him;—and if there were one thing more than another which his lordship dreaded, it was a lunatic—so that his countenance gradually assumed an expression of dismay: but still he went on to observe, “You must pardon me, ma’am, if I again remind you that I am still unacquainted with——”

“Perfectly true, my dear Lord Petersfield,” ejaculated Lady Bess “you are unacquainted with all those who spoke so highly of you in Paris. But considering the state of affairs at home, and looking at the condition of continental politics—thence carrying the range of our vision as far as the oriental climes, not even excluding China——”

“Ma’am, ma’am—I really must beg——But perhaps,” exclaimed Lord Petersfield, now positively worked up to a state of excitement most rare and unusual with his cautious and wary character,—“perhaps it would be better if you were to explain your business to her ladyship. Lady Petersfield is at home——”

“That’s the very thing that I do wish and that I have already stated three distinct times to your lordship,” interrupted Lady Bess, with an air of astonishment that he should only have this moment comprehended her meaning and her object.

“Oh, if that’s the case,” said Lord Petersfield, somewhat relieved, but more inclined than ever to think that his own ideas must have been hitherto somewhat foggy and opaque. “I will h her ladyship to you at once. I pardon me for leaving you for a moments:”—but turning when he had the door, Lord Petersfield made more effort to elicit the name of hisress by saying, “I beg pardon—who you tell me I was to have the honour of abating to have called to see Lady Petersfield?”

“The question is most natural, my lord,” answered Lady Bess; “and on your lordship’s return—when your lordship’s shall have returned—and in so returning shall be accompanied by her ladyship—whom on your return I shall be so happy to sec——”

“Oh, very well!” ejaculated Petersfield: and despairing of evoking the answer he required, he quitted the room in a degree of haste totally at variance with his usual sedate pomposity, and wondering whether Lady Petersfield would be able to make anything more out of this singular mistress than he had done.

But the instant the door had closed behind him, Lady Bess sprang from her chair and opened a book which lay upon the table, and on the gilt lettering on the back of which her eyes had now settled. For a moment she glanced down the index: then observing the particular page she required, she turned to that page—and the ejaculation of “Yes, it is she! Frank was right!” fell from her lips.

For but a moment did her look linger on the handsome countenance of that portrait: and then she tore the leaf from the book. Hastily rolling it up into the smallest convenient compass, she secured it about her person; and closing the book, resumed her seat. Almost immediately afterwards the door opened, and Lady Petersfield entered followed by her husband.

Her ladyship was a tall, thin, thread-paper looking woman, with a hatchet countenance, a vinegar aspect, and altogether a mien as unprepossessing as it was possible to conceive. She was stiff and prim: a poker was litherness in comparison. With a very evil eye indeed did she fix her looks upon Lady Bess, whom, from the few words his lordship had spoken to her ladyship while conducting her thither, she was prepared to regard either as a mad woman or an impostress. But Lady Bess, nothing abashed, affected to gaze upon her ladyship with mingled surprise and disappointment: and then turning to the nobleman, she said, “Is this Lady Petersfield?”

“I—I really cannot answer so point-blank a question,” stammered his lordship taken very very much aback. “It may be Lady Petersfield: but—but—I should be sorry to answer rashly or precipitately—I cannot

compromise myself in so grave and serious a matter."

"Well, but in any case this is assuredly not the lady whom I expected to meet," said Lady Bess. "Not but that her ladyship is a very agreeable-looking lady--still she is not the same--"

"And pray whom did you expect to meet then?" asked Lady Petersfield, with a look which if shed upon vinegar would double its sourness.

"I see that there is some mistake," answered Lady Bess. "I sincerely apologise for the trouble I have given. I must have erred as to the name mentioned me by the lady whom I met at a mutual friend's in the country some time ago, and who pressed me to call upon her when I came to London. Really and truly, I am grieved at the trouble I have occasion'd."

With these words Lady Bess made a graceful curtsey and issued from the room, leaving the nobleman and his wife nailed to where they stood, and not knowing what to think of this extraordinary proceeding.

"Petersfield," said her ladyship, "what is the meaning of this?"

"My dear, I—I am not sure even that I am Petersfield" stammered her husband: "for my thoughts were never so confounded before, I should not like to compromise myself by any rash opinion. I cannot make it out. It may be,—it is possible to be some trick of the Whig party—some base devise of the enemy—"

"Some base devise of the fiddlestick," cried Lady Petersfield. "The woman was mad—quite mad, and I really do begin to suspect that you have had some share in her madness. Ah! my lord! I am afraid you have been a gay deceiver;"—and she looked daggers at her husband.

"I—Lady Petersfield—a what did you say?" asked the diplomatist in utter consternation: "a gay deceiver? I—I—am dismayed!"

But leaving the nobleman and his wife to settle the little dispute which had grown out of the visit of Lady Bess, we must follow the latter away from Portman Square. Right merrily did she chuckle over the success of her enterprise: and when she found herself in a cab, which she stopped and entered, she indulged in a long and hearty laugh at the way in which she had mystified the diplomatist. She now repaired to the place to which she was bound at the moment she met

her brother. The cabman had received his instructions; and the vehicle soon stopped at the door of an office in Saville Row, Regent Street. But as Lady Bess looked at her watch and observed that it was so late as six o'clock in the evening, she said to herself, "It is hardly worth while to alight—for he is sure to be gone. But still it will be as well to inquire."

She accordingly descended from the vehicle and entered the house, the front door of which stood open. Passing through folding-doors of green-baize, she proceeded along the passage, and knocked at a door on which was painted the word *Private*. A man's voice from within bade her walk in, which she did. The room that she thus entered was a lawyer's private office; and the attorney himself was seated at a desk therein. He was an old man—very short and very thin—with a cadaverous countenance, sharp angular features, and hair as white as snow. There was something sinister and disagreeable in his look; and every line and lineament of his face denoted that love of gold constituted the ruling passion of the individual.

Immediately recognizing Lady Bess, he rose from his seat—bowed with profound respect—placed a chair for her accommodation—and did not resume his own until she had taken it. Altogether his bearing and manner indicated the deference shown towards one of superior rank.

"I scarcely hoped to find you here at this hour, Mr. Robson," said the visitress.

"As your ladyship is aware," answered the attorney, "I usually leave at five o'clock: but business of some little importance has detained me until now."

"Ah! you are making money as fast as ever, I suppose," said Lady Bess with a smile; and yet at the same time there was something like contempt or scorn in her looks as she threw them for a moment upon the old man. "Nothing like money, Mr. Robson—is there?"

"Well, even though your ladyship should be speaking facetiously," replied the lawyer, rubbing his hands in the self-gratulatory style of one who possesses the pleasing consciousness of being well off, "your ladyship has given utterance to a solemn truth, and I presume that your ladyship has called for your own money now?"

"Exactly so, Mr. Robson. It is but a

pittance—and yet it is as well to receive it. Have you the receipt ready drawn up for me to sign?"

"Here it is, my lady," was the reply. "I expected your ladyship yesterday or to-day, and prepared it accordingly. But let me look out the money."

Thereupon Mr. Robson opened a drawer in his desk, took out a number of bank-notes, and counted down sufficient to make up a hundred pounds. Lady Bess did not take the trouble to satisfy herself that the sum was correct; but crumpling up all the bank-notes together, she thrust them into her pocket—and then taking the pen which the old lawyer obsequiously handed her, she signed the receipt. But the name: which she appended there was not *Chandos* it had a title of nobility connected with it—a proud and a lofty title according to the estimation of those who value such nominal appendages and aristocratic distinctions.

This little business being transacted, Lady Bess quitted the office, accompanied however by the old attorney, who obsequiously persisted in escorting her to the cab; and though it was but a hired street-vehicle which she entered, he made her as profound a bow when it drove away as if it had been a private-carriage emblazoned with armorial bearings.

Lady Bess now drove home to her own pretty little cottage in the neighbourhood of Edmonton; and dismissing the cab, she entered the elegantly furnished parlour which has already been described in an earlier chapter of our narrative. Rosa, her faithful servant, followed her mistress into the room; and in anticipation of the question which Lady Bess was about to put, she said, "He seems to be much better. The doctor has been and declares his opinion that in a few days he will be convalescent."

"But has he become more lucid?" asked Lady Bess: "does his reason seem to be regaining its balance?"

"I think so," answered Rosa: "for we have been sitting up with the old man for some hours while you were away, and he asked several questions which appeared rational enough; but were only put singly and at long intervals, and the answers did not suggest other questions." "What questions did he ask?" inquired Lady Bess.

"He asked where he was; and when

I told him beneath a friendly roof, he only closed his eyes and looked just as if he was lost in thought; but whether he has the power to think so much at all, I cannot say. After a while he asked who the kind and handsome lady was that came in to see him three or four times a day; and when I told him that it was Mrs. *Chandos*, the same who had dressed herself in man's clothes to help in delivering him, a smile played for a moment upon his countenance, and he then again fell into that mood of seeming abstraction. Do you know, ma'am, that the more one looks at him the more one is inclined to think that if he were well and rational, and had not that strange look, he would be handsome? He has got good features—his eyes are fine, but spoilt by that vacant regard which they possess. His teeth are remarkably good—"

"Well, well, Rosa!" interrupted Lady Bess, laughing, "if you like to fall in love with him you may. Is the old nurse attentive?"

"Very," answered Rosa; "and what is better still, she is not impertinently curious. So long as she has her beer and her brandy with due regularity, as well as her five or six meals a-day, I do not think that she will ask many questions."

"But the doctor—did he endeavour to ascertain from you any particulars concerning the patient?" demanded Lady Bess.

"Yes: but I told him that he was a cousin of yours, whom you had not seen for a long time—in short, I said all that was necessary to satisfy the doctor, and likewise to prevent him from thinking it odd that you should have a young man in your house."

"That was considerate on your part Rosa," responded Lady Bess; "for although you know that I am tolerably indifferent in most respects about the opinion of the world, yet there is one point on which I am rather scrupulous."

"Well, my dear mistress," rejoined Rosa, laughing, "whatever may be said of you after you are dead and gone it is very certain that scandal must leave your reputation as a woman alone. It's really quite astonishing to me that such a beautiful, handsome, fine-looking creature as you are—pray excuse me for saying all this—"

"Indeed I shall not excuse you at all," interrupted Lady Bess, laughing

"for you know that I dislike this kind of flattery—or if being too indifferent to dislike it, I certainly think that you might talk upon another subject."

She put off her bonnet and shawl, and bade Rosa, who was going to carry the things up-stairs, see whether the patient was awake; as if so, Lady Bess would pay him a visit so soon as she had partaken of some refreshments which were already spread upon the table. Rosa returned in a few minutes with the information that he was wide awake, and was conversing with the nurse more lucidly and continuously than he yet had done. Accordingly, so soon as Lady Bess had furnished her repast, she ascended to the bed-chamber where the invalid lay.

CHAPTER L.

THE INVALID.

THE individual of whom we are speaking was the pale-faced stranger whom Lady Bess had rescued from captivity at Beech-Tree Lodge. On separating from her companions on the night alluded to—having hastily divided with them the fruits of their expedition—Lady Bess had brought that mysterious individual home to her cottage; but so great was the excitement which this restoration to liberty produced, that scarcely had he crossed the threshold of the hospitable abode when he fell down in a fit and was conveyed to bed dangerously ill. Medical assistance was at once summoned from Tottenham—composing draughts were given—and Lady Bess with Rosa sat up by his bedside for the remainder of that night. In the morning a nurse was engaged to attend upon the invalid; and thus everything was done to minister to his comfort, tranquillize his mind, and ensure his recovery. The third day since his rescue was now drawing to a close, and his progress towards convalescence was satisfactory.

On ascending to the sick-chamber after having partaken of refreshments as above described, Lady Bess found that the patient was indeed much improved; and the instant she entered the room, an expression of joy and gratitude brightened upon his pale countenance, as he exclaimed, "Oh! my kind friend—my benefactress—I am glad you are come to me again!"

Lady Bess took his emaciated hand and shook it cordially; but he retain-

ing her's, pressed it to his lips with the warmth of his grateful feelings—and then tears trickled down his wan haggard cheeks as his head lay supported upon the pillows.

"You feel better?" said Lady Bess, sitting down in a chair by the bedside.

"Much better—Oh! so much better," answered the invalid. "And I am better *here* too," he added, placing his hand upon his forehead. "There are many things that I wish to say to you," he continued, thus appearing to proffer of his own accord those explanations concerning himself that Lady Bess so much longed to hear. "I have a great deal upon my mind and shall feel relieved when I have told you everything."

"And I," responded Lady Bess, "shall be rejoiced to become your confidante. If you feel well enough now to speak at any length—"

"Yes—I feel well enough," he answered. "But where is that sweet interesting creature who was also at the house yonder—Beech-Tree Lodge—you know whom I mean? Did she not leave it with us?"—and he again pressed his hand to his brow, but this time as if to steady his ideas and collect his reminiscences.

"Yes—she left the house with us," returned Lady Bess. "Her name is Henrietta Leyden. But perhaps you knew something about her?"

"No—nothing. Henrietta! what a pretty name!" and he repeated it three or four times over in a way that showed that there was still a certain degree of childishness characterizing his mind. "Where is she? does she live here? I should like to see her again. But you, my dear friend, are not angry because I say this? No; I am sure you are not. You cannot be: you are too good to be angry."

"Angry? no, certainly not!" replied Lady Bess, with an encouraging smile. "Henrietta Leydon does not live here, she left us the other night, when we issued from Beech-Tree Lodge, to return to her own home. But she will come to see us—I feel assured she will. She was much interested in you."

"Ah! sweet Henrietta! pretty Henrietta!" said the invalid; and in a listless vacant manner did he go on repeating these words in a low murmuring tone.

Lady Bess began to fear that after

all he would not be in a condition to give her any explanations at present; but suddenly raising his eyes towards her countenance with a return of their lucid expression, he said, "Now let us talk."

Lady Bess made a sign to the old nurse, who accordingly quitted the room; and she remained alone with the invalid.

"I do not know," he resumed, speaking slowly and deliberately, with the air of one who is afraid of throwing his thoughts into confusion by pursuing their thread with too much precipitation,—"I do not know that I shall be able to make you comprehend all I wish to say: for sometimes when it seems to me that I am catching a recollection of the past, it escapes from me, and then a cloud settles upon my mind and I see nothing clearly for some time. But let me try, I know that when I was a child I had a very sweet, pretty, and kind mother; and often and often has her image risen upon so plainly and perfectly before me that I recognized it in an instant. She was Lady Everton

"Ah! I thought so," muttered Lady Bess to herself. "I felt assured it would be thus!"

My father," he continued, "was Lord Everton—not the vile wicked man who has kept me so long a prisoner at Beech-Tree Lodge—but his elder brother: and I suppose that it is because my father died long ago that my cruel uncle has become Lord Everton. And yet I do not know how this could be; because when I was a boy I was always made to understand that I should one day be Lord Everton. But I suppose it is that my cruel uncle shut me up and kept me captive that the world might think me dead, and he might be Lord Everton instead of me, and grasp all riches that ought to be mine.

"That is the explanation of your uncle's wickedness," answered Lady Bess. "He did not dare kill you outright, and therefore he kept you shut up at Beech-Tree Lodge. But you shall be Lord Everton yet, in spite of him. Indeed you are Lord Everton now; and he is only an infamous usurper."

"Oh, my dear kind benefactress—my good Mrs. Chandos—my excellent friend!" exclaimed the invalid: what joyful things you are telling me!"—and again seizing her hand, he conveyed it to his lips.

"Do not excite yourself, my good friend," said Lady Bess. All that I promise you I will perform: but we shall have to proceed cautiously—and perhaps it will not be the work of a single day to establish your claim and prove your identity. But go on. Do you know how old you are?"

"I remember very well that my birthday used to be kept on the 8th of June—and stop—I remember too I was told that I was born in 1816—yes, I am sure of it."

"Then you are twenty-eight," said Lady Bess; "and that is about the age that I conjectured. Can you remember how long you have been at Beech-Tree Lodge?"

"Stay, and I will reflect," said the invalid, again pressing his hand to his brow: then after a pause, he said, "I know that I was twelve when I was told that my father was coming home from India after a long, long absence; and it was just at the same time that I was one night put into a carriage by Lord Everton, Bellamy, and Theodore Barclay, and taken off to Beech-Tree Lodge. There I have remained ever since."

"Sixteen years of captivity," said Bess. "Poor young man, this is sad indeed! But where were you at the time when you were snatched away in that manner?"

"Oh! it was at Everton Park, where I used to live with my mother. It was a beautiful place—such a fine large house, and such numbers of servants! There were carriages, and horses, and everything in grand style. Oh! it was a dreadful change to be taken and shut up in that vile place from which you delivered me!"

"But," said Lady Bess, "it surely was not with your mother's consent that you were thus taken away?"

"God forbid that I should think so: for my poor mother seemed to love me dearly. I do not think she was happy—I often saw her cry, particularly when my cruel uncle called at the Park. They used to talk together in whispers; and he must have said very harsh things to her, for I recollect that it was always then she cried most and seemed so unhappy. No—I cannot believe that she let me be carried off in that manner. It was in the middle of the night when it happened; and though I cried very much and thought that my uncle was going to do me some harm, he would not let me see

my mother before I was hurried away."

"And you say that your father was in India at the time and was coming home? Do you not recollect your father?"

"Not in the least. He went out to India soon after I was born. I know that he was a great General as well as a Lord, and went to India to command the armies there."

"And from the moment that you were taken to Beech-Tree Lodge sixteen years ago, you never saw your mother?" asked Lady Bess.

"Never," was the reply. "I used to cry very much for her, and asked Mr. Bellamy and Mrs. Martin to take me to her: but they always told me to hold my tongue—and they even threatened to kill me if I ever spoke about her to any of the servants of Beech-Tree Lodge. Ah! I have been very, very miserable at the Lodge, all by myself in a room with iron bars at the windows, and the door constantly locked. I used to think that I should go mad; and sometimes it appeared to me as if I awoke from a very long dream, scarcely able to recollect what I had been thinking of. Indeed," he added slowly and with a deep seriousness of countenance, "I do think that there were intervals when I forgot all that was happening—where I was—everything connected with the past—in short, I am afraid that there were times when I was really mad."

"Do not think of those bad times any longer," said Lady Bess in a soothing tone. "No doubt your captivity has done you a great deal of harm: but you will get well soon, and be happy and comfortable again—because no unkindness will be shown to you here, and I will not allow any one to come to take you away. Indeed, your cruel uncle does not know where you are at present; and if he be searching for you, his search will assuredly be in vain. Of course you know that your father is dead?"

"Yes—because Mr. Bellamy and Mrs. Martin were both talking of it one day when they had met out in the garden walking with them. That was soon after I was taken to Beech-Tree Lodge. They did not think that I was listening at the time; but I overheard what they said, and asked them about it. I cried very much; for I had hoped that when my father came back to England, he would take me away from Beech-Tree Lodge and punish my cruel uncle for

keeping me there. I used to be told at Everton Park that when my father came back from the East Indies he would be so glad to see his Adolphus

"Then your Christian name is Adolphus?" said Lady Bess.

"Yes: I was named after my father—his name was Adolphus also. But do you think that Henrietta will come to see us?" asked the invalid, his ideas suddenly changing with feverish eccentricity into another channel. "I must tell you something about her. I used to think to myself latterly when I was at Beech-Tree Lodge, that if I could only manage to open the door of my room, I should be able to escape and get back to my poor mother. So I used to pass hours in examining the lock: but I could not open it. At last one day, when I was taken down to walk in the garden with that man Bellamy—a cruel, wicked man—I saw a rusty key lying on one of the borders. I picked it up unseen by him, and kept it. Several times did I try to open my chamber-door with it: I found that it turned in the lock—but still the door kept shut—and then I recollect that it was bolted on the outside. But one night—it must have been in the middle of the night, when I could not sleep—I thought to myself that if by any accident the person who had been last with me had not bolted the door I might get out. And sure enough, when I unlocked the door with my rusty key, it did open. I stole out of the room and descended the stairs all in the dark. I had to feel my way along the wall of the passage to reach the next staircase; and in so doing, my hand encountered something that seemed to be a knob in the wall. I don't know how it was, but by just touching that knob, a door seemed to open suddenly. I was at first very much frightened; but when I saw the moonlight shining in through a window facing the open door, I thought that this would perhaps be some avenue of escape. I stole in, and found myself in a bedroom. The curtains were closed at the foot of the bed; and I stood wondering whether anybody was in that couch. Perhaps it was my cruel uncle—perhaps it was Bellamy—perhaps it was Mrs. Martin? I was much frightened, and stood still listening to ascertain if I could hear any one breathe. I did—and it was the breathing of some person who was evidently asleep. Still I remained

quiet, not knowing what to do: then the breathing ceased—and feeling great curiosity I peeped through the curtains at the foot of the bed. By the light of moon and stars I saw such a beautiful face upon the pillow: the eyes were looking at me—and I at once perceived that I was causing a terrible affright. I heard the sweet creature moan with a sort of horror; and much terrified myself, lest she should alarm the house, I retrograded rapidly—shut the door behind me—and ran back to my own chamber. There I locked myself in again; and I do not know what more I thought of that night."

"I suppose that the occupant of the chamber you had thus entered was Henrietta?" said Lady Bass.

"Wait and you shall hear," resumed Adolphus, now appearing to have more command over his thoughts and recollections than he had hitherto possessed. "I think it must have been the next night that I tried my door again—again found that it had not been bolted on the outside—and again did I steal forth. I thought that I would go and see that sweet pretty creature in her chamber: for I know not how it was, but I entertained an idea that she was a prisoner like myself. I was much interested in her; and I thought that if she were a prisoner I would help her to escape with me. I felt along the wall of the passage for the metal knob—found it—and opened the door leading into her chamber. There was a candle burning in the room; and that beautiful creature, with her clothes on, was reclining in a large arm-chair. She was asleep—and I stood still to gaze upon her. I thought that I had never seen any one so beautiful: I longed to go and kiss her as she slept: there was such a sweetness in her countenance—so different to the disagreeable look of that horrid Mrs. Martin. She began to awake: and I knew not then what to do. I grew frightened; but mustering up my courage, I advanced towards her, determined to speak. I raised my hand to make a sign to her to be silent and not to be afraid: but she suddenly seemed to faint—and I was so confused and bewildered that I turned away, shut the door, and again hurried back to my own chamber. I did not think of any farther attempt at escape that night. Even if I had found the means, I do not think that I should have fled to leave that poor

girl behind me. The next day, from the window of my chamber I saw her walking with that odious Mrs. Martin in the garden at the back of the house. How different was this wretched creature from the vile woman she was with! I thought to myself that if they would allow me to have that interesting being to come and sit with me a little and talk to me, I should not so much mind living at Beech-Tree Lodge. But no, no—I knew they would not: they never did anything to another me in my captivity—and so wretched was I at times, that I used to cry out aloud, even in the deep silence of the night, in the bitterness of my anguish."

"Do not think of that any more, Adolphus," said Lady Bass, as soothingly as if she were speaking to a child: "it will only make you unhappy. Have you told me all your adventures with the rusty key of your own chamber and the secret door of Henrietta's? for I am quite sure that you are speaking of her."

"Oh! I have a great deal more to tell you. We nearly succeeded in escaping together once: and I must explain to you how it was. Another night—I think it must have been the next—I again stole forth from my chamber, descended the stairs, and crept along the passage. But how frightened was I when I saw that secret door open and a light streaming out! I stopped to listen. Oh! that cruel uncle of mine was with Henrietta, threatening her—ill-treating her. I rushed in and dashed him to the ground. Then I seized Henrietta's arm and hurried her from the room. Oh, to escape! But no—we were not to escape *then*. Somehow or another the household had been alarmed, so that Bellamy and Mrs. Martin with some of the servants caught us. The monster Bellamy struck me down; and when I came to myself, I was no longer an occupant of the chamber which for so many years had been mine but found that I had been removed up to that loft where you afterwards discovered me. That is all."

"And you still experience for Henrietta the same kind feeling—the same sympathy?" said Lady Bass, perfectly well understanding that the unfortunate Adolphus had become deeply smitten with the young damsel's beauty, though he himself did not comprehend the nature of the feeling.

"Yes—Oh, yes—I love her very much, and shall be so glad to see her

again :”—and as he thus spoke, his pale haggard countenance became animated with a light reflecting the emotions of the heart.

“ Depend upon it you will see Henrietta again,” answered Lady Bess. “ But have you not wearied yourself by so much talking ? ”

“ Yes, a little : and yet I feel relieved by having told you all these things. I thought when I began that I should have had much more to tell you ; but as I went on, a great deal of what I had been thinking of slipped out of my mind. Perhaps I shall remember more to-morrow ; and you may rest assured that I will tell you everything.”

“ Now you would do well to compose yourself to sleep,” said Lady Bess.

“ If you will not go away. Promise me to remain here by my bedside, and then I shall sleep in peace and comfort.”

“ I will stay here,” was the response of his kind hostess.

Thereupon Adolphus, like a tractable and satisfied child, closed his eyes and was soon asleep.

For some time Lady Bess sat thinking upon all he had told her : but gradually her thoughts wandered elsewhere and settled themselves upon the incidents of that day. She reflected with joy upon the meeting with her brother, and the happy discovery thus made that he was not lying cold in the silent grave as he had been treacherously led to suppose : but a gloom gradually settled upon her countenance as she thought to herself, “ Oh, if he should discover what I am ! But no, no—he must not be suffered to find out *that*. How strange that he should be in the Saxondale family, and it was the young lordling who bears this name that I despoiled a little while back. The lawyers too connected with the affairs of that family, were those with whom I had that strange and exciting adventure : ” and now the radiance of triumph superseded the gloom upon the amazonian lady’s features, as her grand exploit of the ride to Dover came back to her memory.

Again did her thoughts turn into another channel, and settled themselves upon her interview with Lord and Lady Petersfield, which likewise brought a smile to her lips : but suddenly becoming grave and serious, she drew forth the portrait which she had torn from the volume, and unrolling it, fixed her eyes upon the beautiful

countenance of the lady represented there.

“ Was this indeed my mother ? ” she said to herself, contemplating those features and endeavouring to trace therein some resemblance to her own. “ Methinks there is a faint, faint likeness between this beautiful patrician lady and my dear brother Frank—yes, and also a likeness to myself. And yet it may be but fancy. Assuredly I am not capable of vanity sufficient to induce me to assimilate myself to this lady. And yet I do not think there is a likeness to both me and Frank. The pencilling of the brows resembles those of my brother—there is something too in the look—the expression—the general air, reminding me of him. But with regard to myself—”

“ What have you there, my good friend ? ” asked the invalid, who had just awaked.

“ A very pretty picture,” responded Lady Bess “ I value it highly, but will let you look at it.”

“ Oh ! I would not wish to keep anything that you value,” answered Adolphus with affectionate gratitude towards her who had delivered him from his horrible captivity. “ But do let me look at it. You seem to be surveying it with so much intentness, and your lips move as if you were talking to yourself.”

Lady Bess handed the portrait to Adolphus : but the instant his eyes fell upon it, an ejaculation of wild joy burst from his lips—his pale countenance became illuminated with the lustre of animation—and he cried out, “ It is she—it is she—my mother ! ”

Lady Bess could scarcely believe her ears, and for a few moments she lost the faculty of speech in the wildering surprise which seized upon her. But as she still regarded the invalid with earnest attention, she saw that he continued to contemplate the portrait in a manner which forbade her to believe that the recognized identity was a mere delusion of his brain.

“ You say that this is the portrait of your mother ? ” at length observed Lady Bess, “ the portrait of Lady Everton ? ”

“ Yes, yes : it is the portrait of my mother ! ” cried Adolphus. “ Oh ! think you that her image is not sufficiently impressed upon my mind to render me confident of the fact ? But you yourself knew it—you kindly and generously procured this portrait for me—O heavens ! is my dear mother

alive ? Tell me, tell me where she is : let me go to her—or do you send for her ——”

But Lady Bess made no answer ; she was absorbed in the deepest reflection.

“ If Lady Everton, then, be my mother and Frank’s mother, we are the sister and brother of him who lies here now. But how can this be ? No : it is impossible. There must be some strange mistake—some wild error on one side or the other. I know not what to think : I am bewildered. At all events it will be prudent to say naught of my own past history to Adolphus at present. No : for were I to unfold my suspicion that the original of that portrait was the mother of Frank and myself, it would be to proclaim the mother of Adolphus unfaithful to her husband. Yet during that absence in India what may not have taken place ? ”

“ Wherefore are you thus thoughtful ? whersfore do you not answer me ? ” cried Adolphus, whose ideas appeared to be more collected than they even were ere he went to sleep ; and the expression of his eyes was more settled, or rather less vacant, while the light of joy was now shining in them.

“ I can assure you, my dear friend, ” replied Lady Bess, “ that it was by mere accident I showed you this portrait. I had no earthly conception that you would recognize it. I did not even know who the original was. It was torn from a book containing many portraits of the ladies of the aristocracy. But tell me, my dear Adolphus, do you know whether your mother was connected with the Court ? ”

“ Yes—I remember now—she was often, very often with the Princess Sophia, and used to stay with her Royal Highness for weeks and months together—sometimes at Kew—sometimes at Windsor—sometimes at St. James’s Palace. It is strange how my recollections are coming back.”

“ And no doubt your mother, Adolphus, used to have a great number of ladies staying with her at different times ? ”

“ Yes : but I do not recollect any of their names now. Perhaps I shall presently, or another time : ”—and he appeared to strain himself as it were to give a fresh impulse to his memory.

“ Does the name of Lord Petersfield happen to be familiar to be ? ” asked Lady Bess.

“ Lord Petersfield ? ” echoed Adolphus. “ Oh, yes—he was a frequent visitor at Everton Park, and I have

seen him also at St. James’s Palace. I think at the time he occupied a post in the household of the Princess Sophia. I am certain he did. But now my ideas are becoming confused again—a dimness seems to spread itself over my mental vision—things that just now were vivid, are becoming dark—But, Oh ! this portrait—every lineament—every line—even to the very expression of the countenance itself—all are as clear as ever in my brain ! ”

He ceased speaking, and reclining back upon the pillow whence he had started up in the excitement of his joy on first beholding the portrait, closed his eyes as if to concentrate all his powers of thought inwardly, and thus endeavour to extricate himself by a strong effort from the chaos of confusion into which he was relapsing. Sleep gradually came upon him ; and Lady Bess, summoning back the nurse to the chamber, descended to her own elegantly furnished parlour. Just at that moment there was a knock at the door ; and Rosa, having answered the summons, informed her mistress that a person named Theodore Barclay desired to speak with her. Lady Bess ordered him to be introduced ; and the footman of Beech-Tree Lodge was accordingly shown into the parlour.

CHAPTER LI.

FOLLOWING UP THE CLUE.

THEODORE BARCLAY, who now appeared dressed in plain clothes, was a man about forty years of age, with a countenance that was not ill-looking, but the expression of the features indicating full plainly that he was of a cunning, crafty disposition.

“ I received your note, ma’am, at the Hornsey post-office, ” he said, “ and am here accordingly.”

Lady Bess desired him to take a seat ; and as he did so, he could not help contemplating with mingled curiosity and admiration the heroic lady whom he now beheld in the apparel that suited her sex.

“ What has taken place at Beech-Tree Lodge ? ” she went on to ask. “ Have any measures been adopted to search of him whom I rescued the other night ? ”

“ No—none, ” returned Barclay. “ Lord Everton is ill in bed through fright and excitement ; and a sort of

consternation prevails in the house. No one there seems to know what to think or what to do; but the general belief is that there will be precious explosion."

"Now tell me candidly," said Lady Bess, looking the man very hard in the face: "do you know who that alleged lunatic whom I rescued from captivity, really is?"

"Well, ma'am, to speak the truth, I do."

"And the other servants?" asked Lady Bess.

"They don't know as positive as I: but they have a very shrewd motion."

"Of course—that he is the late Lord's son—the present Lord's nephew—and therefore by rights the true Lord Everton?"

"That is it, ma'am," responded Barclay. "I may observe that Bellamy and Mrs. Martin used to take care that there was as little communication as possible between the prisoner and the servants generally, myself excepted. But we were all forbidden to gossip, on pain of dismissal; and as we were uncommon handsomely paid, it answered our purpose well enough to hold our tongues."

"But still you must be aware that in the village of Hornsey there are some strange rumours afloat relative to that alleged lunatic? When I determined the other day to effect an entry into the house at night, I went and made inquiries in the neighbourhood concerning the establishment: for indeed, in the first instance, I was altogether unacquainted with every particular regarding it. It was a note which Miss Leydon shot from the window and which accidentally fell into my hand, that made me resolve to espouse her cause; and the preliminary steps were naturally to ascertain as much as I could relative to the house itself and the people in it. I was told in the village that it was a licensed lunatic asylum, but that it was generally supposed there was but one lunatic within the walls, around whom a strange mystery hung, rumour declaring that he was the rightful Lord Everton."

"I myself was often questioned by the people in Hornsey upon the same point," answered Theodore Barclay: "but I used to tell them that these rumours had only got abroad from the fact that the poor lunatic believed himself to be Lord Everton's nephew, and that he had said as much to some

of the servants, who whispered the thing about."

"Well, be this as it may," continued Lady Bess, "you of course have all along known that the alleged lunatic spoke the truth. How was it that you never thought of helping him to escape in the hope that if he recovered his rights you would be well rewarded?"

"To speak the truth," answered Barclay, "because I saw that the thing was so surrounded with difficulties I might have got myself out of a good situation in running after a shadow. You see, ma'am, the death of Adolphus Everton when twelve years old was generally believed: a funeral took place, and a coffin represented to contain the deceased was buried in the family vault. Moreover, the present Lord Everton slipped as easy and comfortable as possible into the enjoyment of the title and estates; and so, all these things considered, I never thought it worth my while to meddle any farther in the matter."

"Besides which," added Lady Bess significantly, "you had already meddled a little too much, perhaps: for I am no stranger to the part you played in helping to carry him off in the middle of the night. How long ago was that?"

"It was sixteen years ago: so he was quite a boy at the time. I was then three or four-and-twenty—quite a raw young man up from the country—totally inexperienced in life, and anxious only to make money. This I saw I could do in Lord Everton's service."

"And you have doubtless done so. But now, if in any way you can help me in putting this injured young man in possession of his rights, you shall be well and handsomely rewarded."

"To tell the truth," observed Barclay, after a pause, during which he seemed to reflect profoundly, "there is something which I might throw a light upon if I chose. I threw out the hint just now —,

"I did not understand it," responded Lady Bess.

"It was when I spoke of the interment affair I was in *that* business; though as I have just said, quite a raw green chap. But how can you show me that it will be better worth my while to turn right round against the old man than to stick to him?"

"It will be better worth your while," replied Lady Bess, "because it is inevitable that the old man, as you call him, will be stripped of both title

and estate, and the young one will be put in possession of them. The old man therefore will be deprived of the means of rewarding those who uselessly adhere to his desperate fortunes; whereas, on the other hand, the young man will shortly be enabled to reward handsomely those who are now instrumental in forwarding his views."

"I understand," observed Theodore Barclay; "and as you ma'am, seem to have a pretty considerable finger in this pie, it will be to you that I shall trust for a handsome reward."

"Be it so: and now proceed. What have you to tell?"

"If you could only manage to find out a fellow by the name of Bob Shakerly ——"

"What! he who was once a resurrection man?" exclaimed Lady Bess: for she had happened to hear the individual spoken of on one of those occasions which had thrown her in contact with the gang frequenting Solomon Patch's house in Agar Town.

"The very same. Is he alive? do you know anything about him?" asked Theodore eagerly.

"I can find out where he is: I know that he is alive—or at least was, a few months ago. But what of him?"

Theodore Barclay bent a very mysterious look upon Lady Bess; and leaning forward, said in an equally mysterious tone of voice, "It was Bob Shakerly, ma'am, the resurrectionist, who supplied a dead body that was passed off as the corpse of the Hon. Master Adolphus, and was buried with all due honours."

"Indeed! this is highly important," exclaimed Lady Bess. "You have given me information of the most vital consequence, and you shall be amply rewarded. But you say that you were mixed up in that business?"

"I helped to convey the dead body into the house at Everton Park. Mr. Everton that then was—the Lord Everton that now is—fetched me up from a little estate he had a good way off down in the country, on purpose to help in that job; and I also was one that ^{intended} to carry off Master Adolphus. In plain terms, you see, ma'am, I was deeply implicated in the whole affair & interested in keeping it as quietable."

"Were indeed. And now tell me, hat Mrs. Martin?"

"A mistress of Lord Everton—erton, as he then was, and

Mr. Everton as I expect he is likely to become again. Mrs. Martin has been a terribly profligate woman: she was once a brilliant beauty about town; and I do believe now that her passions are as strong as ever and have entirely outlived her good looks. Ah! ma'am, she is an awful woman, and I do not think would hesitate at any crime. She has a very comfortable berth at Beech-Tree Lodge—plenty of money—good clothes and good food; and therefore she has not hesitated to make herself useful in any way to the old man. As for Bellamy, he is another creature of the same selfish sort; and I suppose he has likewise feathered his nest pretty comfortably."

"Do you know what has become of Lady Everton, the mother of the unfortunate young man who has so long been kept out of his rights?"

"Her ladyship is living in some seclusion, very strict, and a long way off—in Wales, I think—but I really do not know. Concerning her we scarcely ever heard anything at Beech-Tree Lodge. But I do happen to know that she is alive."

"You know *that*?" So much the better. I am rejoiced!" exclaimed Lady Bess; "Now you must do all you can to discover where she is. Take this sum of a hundred pounds"—and she gave him the notes she had that day received from Mr. Robinson. "It is merely a trivial earnest of what shall hereafter be done for you. Depend upon it your reward will be dealt out with no niggard hand; and whatever explosion may take place, measures shall be adopted to ensure your safety. But, I am in hopes that the entire affair can be settled quietly, and without any explosion at all. Of course you will return to Beech-Tree Lodge, and watch well everything that passes, so that you may be enabled to report occasionally to me. But lose no time in discovering Lady Everton's abode if possible."

"I will do my best," answered Theodore, highly satisfied with the liberality already shown and the promises held forth; and after a little more conversation he took his departure.

It was now dusk; and Lady Bess, finding that Adolphus was sleeping soundly, and conjecturing that after the excitement of his long discourse with her, he would most probably sleep on for a considerable time, resolved to pay a visit to Bob Shakerly at once.

She accordingly hastened to array herself in her male costume, substituting the tight-fitting frock, the waist-coat, and the pantaloons, as well as the neat-shaped boots and all the other requisites of the masculine toilet, for the silk dress and *et cetera* of the female gear. She then mounted her gallant chestnut; and it being now quite dark, rode away in the direction of London. On reaching the district of St. Pancras, she passed into Agar Town; and alighting at Solomon Patch's door, she entered the house. There she heard several persons talking about the double murder in the barge; but none of them attributed the deed to Chiffin. In fact, those who were thus conversing had not the slightest idea that the Cannibal had been concealed in the barge at all, and consequently their suspicions fell not upon him.

This was the first that Lady Bess had heard of the dreadful deed. During the whole morning she had been at home at her cottage, whither the intelligence had not penetrated either by report or through the medium of the newspaper, of which she was no great reader. Afterwards, when she went into town, her attention had been so much engrossed, as the reader has seen, by other circumstances—the meeting with her brother, the visit to Lord Petersfield, and the call upon Mr. Robson—that she had no opportunity of even catching the slightest floating whisper of the terrible occurrence. When therefore she now heard those people at the *Billy Goat* speaking of the murder of Tugs the bargeman and his wife, and the death by suffocation of their child, she was instantaneously inspired with a deep and fearful interest; and she flung a quick glance of inquiry at old Solomon, who was serving gin behind the bar.

"Please your ladyship to walk upstairs for a minute," said the landlord; and he accordingly led the way up into that private room which has been before mentioned.

"Is all this true that I have heard?" asked Lady Bess, with ill-disguised horror.

"Don't be alarmed, my lady," replied Patch, whose attempt thus to reassure and encourage the amazonian heroine was so obsequious that it would have been ludicrous were it not in reference to so dread a subject. "It is indeed too true that Chiffin must

have done this, 'cause he was with 'em at the time."

"Good heavens!" was the subdued ejaculation which came from the lips of Lady Bess; and she literally staggered against the wall, as if stricken with awful remorse at ever having had anything to do with such a miscreant at the Cannibal.

"Deary me, deary me, what is the matter with your ladyship?" asked old Solomon, thinking she was going to faint. "Shall I run and get a drop of brandy, or gin, or rum, or sherry?"

"No, no—be quite—hold your peace," answered Lady Bess impatiently. "This is truly frightful! Those poor people who sheltered and concealed him! Old man," she continued, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "there are certain degrees of wrong—I may even say, of crime, if you will—to which one becomes habituated. Such is my case: but from any blacker turpitude my soul can recoil with as deep a horror as that of the most delicate creature utterly unacquainted with fault or misdeed."

"But your ladyship has always known that Chiffin wasn't over particular," answered Solomon Patch; "and that story of his'n about eating human flesh when he was a younker at sea—"

"He never dared tell it in my presence," interrupted Lady Bess. "it is true that it had reached my ears—but I set it down as an idle vaunt made by him when in his cups. Of course I knew that Chiffin was a desperado; but I did not know that his hands were embrued with blood. Now I believe the tale which hitherto I had regarded as an inflated boast; and I consider him capable of the most satanic deeds. Solomon, were he to enter the room this moment I should recoil from him in horror and aversion. But do not tell him this," she immediately added, shuddering visibly, "if you should see him. I now dread that man—I would not provoke his rancour for worlds—unless indeed he did suddenly appear before me; and then I feel convinced that I could not restrain my feelings."

"Don't be afeard, my lady—depend upon it I sha'n't mention a word of what you say when I see Chiffin—That is, if I ever do see him again; for he is very likely to get out of the country."

"I think not: for from what those people said down in the bar, he does

not even seem to be suspected. Has there been any pursuit after him?"

"Not that I can learn, please your ladyship," replied Patch. "I do not think the detectives has got on the right scent. But won't your ladyship take summut? You look all pale and and no-how."

"No—nothing," she answered petulantly. "You know I never drink."

"Yes, my lady, I know that you have none of them small wices."

She was moving towards the door of the little sordid-looking apartment, when suddenly recollecting the object of her coming, she turned and said, "I had well-nigh forgotten why I called. Do you know the whereabouts of a man named Shakerly?"

"What, old Bob Shakerly?" ejaculated Solomon. "To be sure I do. He was once a body-snatcher: now he's a knacker and makes catsmeat and sassages. It's down at Cow Cross, Smithfield. Your ladyship can't mistake: anybody will tell you Bob Shakerly's yards."

"Put up my horse till I return," said Lady Bess. "I do not like to ride him into London:"—and having thus given her orders, she quitted the room, descended the stairs, and issued from the house; but as those who stood at the bar respectfully made way for her, as she was held in the light of something very superior at the low boozing-ken, they could not avoid noticing that she was exceedingly pale.

Emerging from Agar Town, Lady Bess obtained a cab at the nearest stand, and jumping in, ordered the driver to proceed to Cow Cross. During the half hour which the journey occupied, her whole thoughts were bent upon this diabolical murder of which she had filled her with so profound a horror. Were her heart analysed at the moment, it might perhaps have been found that remorse had arisen there for the adoption of that course of life which had thrown her in the way of such human reptiles as Chiffin, and compelled her to make use of them for her purposes.

Reaching the foul neighbourhood of Cow Cross, Lady Bess alighted from the cab, bade the wait, and proceeded to inquire

Bob Shakerly. He seemed to known in that vicinity as an his ward; and she was erected to a narrow alley nity of which she would ter's yard. Scarcely had

she entered the lane, when her nose was saluted by so fetid a stench that she recoiled for a moment from farther encounter with the pestiferous exhalation. It was a horrible smell of corrupt flesh and mouldy bones, mingling with the sickly steam from cauldrons in which the anatomized animals were sooting down. None save those who have been so unfortunate as to venture upon the confines of a knacker's yard can possibly conceive the horrible malœus produced by those blended effluvia: it was enough to make the strongest stomach heave and become sick. It was an odour, indeed, that was not only fetid and sickly but pungent and penetrating as well,—an odour the pestiferous influence of which one might expect to take away in one's clothes,—an odour that could not fail to pierce into all the surrounding dwellings, to mingle with the hot atmosphere of rooms where the poor lay huddled together in hards-like masses, or to render more fetid still the feverish air in the chamber of the invalid.

No wonder, then, that Lady Bess recoiled at first from the very approaches to that pandemonium of noxious odours: but the next instant conquering her repugnance when she considered the important objects she had in view, she continued her way, literally battling however against the rolling vapours as if they were the billows of a strong tide which she had thus courageously to breast. Dimly through the mephitic exhalations did the lights burn in the wretched houses on either side of this alley; and the shouts of drunken revelry, the imprecations of quarrelling women, the imprecations of brutal husbands, and the screams of ill-treated wives, blended in horrible discordancy. Altogether, it was a neighbourhood which, existing in the very heart of the capital of civilization, was a disgrace to civilization itself!

Lady Bess passed onward, and reaching the end of the alley, found herself at an open gateway, revealing a full view of a spacious yard surrounded by tumble-down sheds and wooden buildings, from several of which the strong light of fires threw a lurid glow into the open space. All the frontages of these buildings gleamed ghastly in that light with the bleaching bones of animals hung up to dry. A glance into the places where the fires were lighted, showed Lady

Bess large cauldrons in which the horse-flesh was boiling; and now that she was so near as to be within reach of the volumes of vapour which rolled away from these cauldrons, the odour became almost stifling in its nauseating intensity. It seemed as if it was an odour that could be felt—that clung around you—adhered to you—stuck to you like a thick and clammy substance—making you feel dirty all over and long to hasten away to put off and eschew for ever the garments thus impregnated with the feculent effluvium.

Heaped up in the corners of the yard were putrifying masses of the entrails and offals of the slaughtered horses: pools of blood darkened the ground in many places—and ever and anon the foot slipped over some slimy substance, such as clotted gore or rotting pieces of flesh, so that a horrible shudder shot upward through the entire frame and the heart heaved as if rising to the very throat. A cart at one extremity, resting slantwise on its shafts, contained a dead horse that had been recently brought in; and in one of the sheds were four or five lining horses, huddled together in a space not more than of sufficient dimensions for one. These poor brutes were starving—yes, literally starving: they were the merest things of skin and bone that ever managed to retain a particle of vitality—and perhaps they were goaded to a keener sense of that last spark of life by the pangs of famine.

Such was the knacker's yard! And this horrible spot, with its nauseating odours, its accumulated filth and feculence, and its instances of hideous cruelty to poor worn-out animals was only one amongst several replete with kindred abominations in that neighbourhood. There they were, in the midst of one of the most densely populated quarters of London—hot-beds of feculence and corruption, ready to blaze up with gun-powder effect into all the devastating horrors of plague and pestilence. And there too, they are now at the present day,—preparing a rich and luscious banquet for the Cholera, whenever that most terrible missionary of Death shall revisit the British capital. Yes—there they are all allowed to exist, not only by the bolted rapacious, and besottedly ignorant Corporation of London, but what is worse, by the Government which is supposed to exercise a pater-

nal supervision over all the most vital interests of the people.

Into that pandemonium of pestilence was it that Lady Bess thus entered; and making her way,—but not without several pauses to conquer the nausea which seized upon her, and many slips over the slimy substances under foot,—towards a place where three or four men were busy in attending to the cauldrons, she asked for Mr. Shakerly. The men desisted for a few moments from their operations to have a good stare at Lady Bess, whose beautifully shaped figure in its elegant costume was brought out into strong relief by the lurid light of the furnaces. They were at first surprised at seeing such a fashionably-attired young gentleman appear within those precincts: but their wonder was enhanced into amazement as the conviction stole upon them that this handsome and exquisitely dressed young gentleman was indeed a very beautiful and fine-grown lady, the rich contour of whose form could not be altogether concealed by the artifices of the male toilet.

"Well I'm blowed, Bill," said one aside to another, "if this isn't a rum go. She don't come to contract for cat's-meat."

"No—or for sassages neether," was the response. "You wants the old un, ma'am—or had I ought to say sir?"

"Whichever you like, my good man," answered Lady Bess, "provided you will only tell me if I could see your master:"—for she was most anxious to escape as soon as possible from the intolerable atmosphere of that place.

"Where be the old un?" asked one of the men of his comrades: and then with a stout staff that he held in his huge hands he stirred up the whole seething contents of the cauldron, which sent forth a cloud of the sickliest vapour, so that volume after volume of the pestilential exhalation rolled over the well-nigh stifled Lady Bess.

"I think he be in the sassage-room," replied the man who had just been particularly appealed to: and as he spoke he lifted up in his hands an enormous piece of horse-flesh so putrid that it was green all over and tossed it into the cauldron: then without even so much as wiping his hands down his greasy blood-stained smock, he took out his tobacco box, drew forth a quid, and thrust it into his mouth.

"Will you tell your master that a

person wishes to see him? or if you will tell me where I can find him, I shall be obliged:—"and Lady Bess spoke with ill-disguised loathing and disgust, for she could endure the hideous scene no longer.

"He be over yonder," was now the answer which her question received; and the individual who gave it, pointed to a part of the building where but a comparatively faint light was seen through the dingy windows.

Lady Bess hastened to traverse the yard; and as she drew near the place indicated, the sounds of a crazy mechanism in whirring motion met her ears. She opened the door, and found herself on the threshold of a small low room, the atmosphere of which was abominably sickly and fetid, and where a miserably shrivelled old man, with a greasy fur cap on his head and the sleeves of his filthy shirt tucked up to his very shoulders, was superintending the operations of the sausage-machine. On a board fixed against the wall and supported with one log of prop, was a pile of pieces of meat of the most disgusting description. They certainly were not green with putridity; but they were black with the unwholesome blood and gore clotted upon them. Just at the very moment that Lady Bess opened the door, the old man was taking up in his hands a quantity of these loathsome morsels and tossing them into the receiver of the machine. Lady Bess turned aside, thinking that she must beat a retreat, and abandoning her object, fled away from this horrible place where every sense was offended or outraged.

"Hullo! who's that there?" exclaimed the old man: then as Lady Bess, conquering her repugnance for the tenth time since she had entered the knacker's yard, turned towards him, he raised one of his blood-stained hands to his cap, saying, "Beg-pardon, sir, but didn't twig at once that it was a well cove. My eye!" he suddenly ejaculated, now discerning her sex: "who be you, ma'am? Why, it's that famous Lady Bess I've heered talked of when I've been once or twice up at Old Sol Patch's. Ain't you Lady Bess?"

"I am—and I wish to have some conversation with you."

"At your service, ma'am. Please to shut the door, and we can talk as comfortable here as anywhere else."

"I could not," replied the amaz-
onian lady. "I have no doubt that your

avocation is lucrative enough, and that you do not like to be disturbed at it. But I can make it worth your while if you will just wash yourself a bit, put some decent clothes on, and meet me in a quarter of an hour at any public-house in the neighbourhood where we can have a room to ourselves and a bottle of wine."

"Well, what's an offer not to be refused," returned old Shakerly: "perticularly the making it worth my while. So it's a bargain. But I'm sorry you look so disgusted at what I'm doing: it's quite astonishing to me. Now surely there's nothink to make you turn up your pretty nose at that sausagework. There's the primest meat sent out of a couple of 'osses as fresh as can be. Why, I gives the heart and livers in with 'em, and that's the reason my sausage-meat is in such request. There isn't a shilling or small eating-house in London that doesn't send to me for sausage meat. And I'll tell you a secret too——But answer me first; d'ye ever eat sausage-rolls at the pastry-cooks?"

Lady Bess made a gesture of impatience, and retreated to the threshold of the door.

"Well, if you have you've enjoyed 'em no doubt," continued the old man; "and if you havn't you've missed a treat. Let me tell you, Lady Bess, that there's many a fine pastry cook as sells his sausage-rolls at tuppence or thruppence which is a dounced good customer to me. My meat, mixed up with pork—the proportions generally one to three—gives a rich flavour, and a firmness to which you can't get in pure pork sausages."

"I must really request that you will make your preparations at once," said Lady Bess ineffably disgusted: "for my time is precious."

"Oh, beg pardon!" said Mr. Shakerly. "Just you go to the public-house that I frequents, ax for a private room, order up the wine, and wait till I come. I sha'n't be a quarter of an hour."

Thereupon the old man described the whereabouts of the public house to which he alluded; and Lady Bess lost no time in vanishing from the knacker's-yard. Right glad was she to escape from the noxious fumes and revolting spectacles of that horrible place. The public-house was speedily found—a private room was placed at her disposal—she did not forget to

order the bottle of wine—and in about twenty minutes Bob Shakerly made his appearance. He was now somewhat more cleanly and presentable in person and in apparel: but nevertheless, if he had expended a bottle of some fragrant essence in expelling, or rather deadening the sickly odour that still clung to him despite his ablutions, it would have been all the better. For the effluvium of a knacker's-yard adheres to one like the taint of a crime or with the tenacity of a remorse!

"Now," said Lady Bess, producing her purse and counting down ten sovereigns upon the table, "this money is at your service provided you give me the information I desire."

The old man's eyes glistened like those of a snake at sight of the gold; and evidently eager to clutch it, he asked what information it was that Lady Bess sought.

"About sixteen years ago," she replied, looking at him very hard in the face to convince him that she knew something about the matter and that no denial or evasion would do,—"you were employed by a certain gentleman who since has borne the title of a nobleman, to procure the dead body of some boy and introduced it into a certain house in the country. It is concerning this transaction that I require all the particulars you can give."

"Well and good," returned old Shakerly. "But how am I to know that I mayn't get myself into trouble by telling you all about it?"

"You will get yourself into trouble if you do not," answered Lady Bess. "I have discovered so complete a clue to the unravelling of the whole conspiracy of which the transaction of the dead body forms a part, that I could at once invoke the powers of the law against everyone concerned. But my object is to have the matter settled quietly—that is to say, as quietly as possible; and the way to do this is by convincing the guilty originator of the whole vile scheme that it is discovered in all its ramifications, and that he would do well to surrender his usurped title and estates in the way less liable to create exposure."

"I understand," said old Bob Shakerly: "frighten his lordship into it—eh? But ten guineas for such information as you want from me, is little enow," added the old man, anxious to drive the best bargain possible.

"Here are twenty," said Lady Bess, producing the remainder of the sum;

"And I will make it up to fifty on the day that the true Lord Everton recovers his rights. If you will not take my word for it, I will give it to you in writing: but doubtless those who have already spoken to you of me—"

"Your ladyship need not say any more," interrupted the old knacker. "I am perfectly satisfied:—"—then having helped himself to the wine, of which Lady Bess refused to partake, he proceeded to observe, "I suppose your time is precious, and therefore I'll come to the point at once."

"Do so," said Lady Bess: "for I am anxious to be gone."

"Well then, it was as you have said," resumed the old man, "just about sixteen years ago that a gentleman came to my lodgings—I was then living up Pancras way—and said that if I liked to do a certain job for him he'd pay me well. I axed who recommended him, or how he come to find me out: and he told me as how that he'd been making 'quiries in some of the low neighbourhoods of London for a resurrectionist. Of course in making them 'quiries he'd passed his-self off as a surgeon: and so it wasn't thought odd. Well, in this way did it appear that he came to hear of me. He then told me his business—which was that he wanted the dead body of a lad about twelve years old, such and such a height, and with dark hair. I was always a rayther cautious kind of a feller, and didn't like standing a chance of getting into trouble: so not liking this business over much, I said as how I must have more explanations. The gentleman then goes on for to say that it suited his purpose, for family reasons and what not to have a certain lad of that very same age put out of the way; but as he didn't chose to go very extreme lengths—which of course meant murdering him—his scheme was to have him locked up in a lunacy 'sylum and make the world believe that he was dead. So then I twigged of course that this was some affair of getting hold of an estate or summut of that sort; and seeing that I could reckon on good payment, I agreed. But I represented to the gentleman that there was a many difficulties in the way; 'cause why, it wasn't *any* dead body that would suit, but must be *one* of a certain age, a certain height, and a certain colour hair. The gentleman said as how he was averse of all them difficulties, and was prepared to pay a good price. In

short, he offered me a couple of hundred guineas for the job, and gave me twenty guineas as an earnest. He told me that I was to come to him the very moment I succeeded, and so of course he let me know who he was—the Honourable Mr. Everton—and he had a house somewhere up at the West End of the town, I forget exactly at this moment where it was."

"No matter where," observed Lady Bess. "Proceed with your statement."

"When the gentleman had gone," continued old Shakerly, "I remained thinking of the business I had to transact, but couldn't exactly see my way clear at first. At last a thought struck me. It happened at the time that I had a precious bad leg through having tumbled into a grave one night when I was doing a bit of body-snatching work; and it rayther suited me than otherwise to lay up for a week or two and get it cured. So I fancied I might kill two birds with the same stone: I therefore went bang at once into the workus of my own parish, which was Saint Pancras, and got put into the 'firmary. The workuses then wasn't what they are now under the New Poor Law: it was easy enough to get into 'em, and there was always a precious swarm in the 'firmary. So I calkilated to myself that it would be odd indeed if out of such a lot there wouldn't be at least one young feller answering the purpose who'd die in the place;—and sure enough therero was just such a lad as the gentleman required—I mean when he became stiff'un. I slept in the bed next but two to that very lad—and while he was dying I marked him as my prey

"Go on, go on—and spare the details," said Lady Bess, shuddering at this description."

"Well then," continued the old man, after having gulped down another draught of wine, "to make a long story short, the boy did die about ten days after I'd entered the workus. It was a hinternal disease, as they called it; and he made a pretty corpse now. They didn't keep the bodies long above ground at the workus: so the funeral soon took place. That very day I discharged myself, although my leg wasn't cured: but that didn't matter—for I thought Mr. Everton's gold would be the best salve for it after all. Well, I lost no time in calling on Mr. Everton and

telling him that I should be prepared that night. He told me to bring the body in a cart to the neighbourhood of Everton Park, which is about twenty mile from London, and named a particular spot where I should be met by himself and some others. He gave me such a good description of the place that I couldn't miss it; and so everything was arranged quite comfortable. That very night, betwixt eleven and twelve o'clock, I had the body out of old St. Pancras, and by two in the morning was at the place of appointment. Mr. Everton with two others met me. One of his companions was a friend of his'n which he called Bellamy: t'other was a country chap that he called Barclay—a sort of servant. Well, betwixt us we conveyed the body into the mansion by a back door, of which Mr. Everton had the keys. We placed it in the bed-room; he then paid me my money, and I took my departure. As I was driving in a leisurely way along the road towards the nearest village—I forget what its name is now—a post-shay and pair dashed past as if going to London; and as it was then close upon day-break, I caught a glimpse of Mr. Everton and Bellamy with a young lad inside the shay, and Barclay was sitting on the box. So I knew what *that* meant; it was the young heir that was being took off to the lunacy 'sylum. Ah! thought I to myself——"

"No matter what you thought interrupted Lady Bess: "is that all you have to tell me respecting the transaction of the substitution of the dead pauper for the living heir?"

"That's all," answered old Shakerly.

"Then take your money," immediately rejoined the amazonian lady; "and trust to me to fulfil my promise when the aim now in view is accomplished."

The old knacker did not require to be hidden twice to pick up the gold coins, which he deposited in a greasy purse, or rather canvas bag: and then he emptied the bottle of sherry. Lady Bess bade him good night and quitting the public-house, she returned to the cab which was waiting for her. It bore her to the immediate vicinage of Agar Town, where she dismissed it; and proceeding to Solomon Patch's, she mounted her horse and rode away in a homeward direction.

It was midnight when Lady Bess

reached her cottage ; and as she alighted from her house, the front door was opened hastily. Frank Paton sprang forth : but the instant he recognised his sister in her male apparel, he beheld therein the terrible confirmation of all he had that day heard from the lips of Lady Saxondale and Mr. Marlow--and with one wild cry of anguish and despair, fell down senseless.

CHAPTER LII.

THE OATH PROPOSED.

IT was the afternoon, and Constance Farefield sat half-reclining upon a sofa in an apartment at Saxondale House. She was alone : books and musical instruments were scattered around her ; and had a stranger entered at the time—or indeed any one unacquainted with the young lady's secret—he would have thought she was beguiling the time by means of those elegant accomplishments which principally pertain to females of her class. Yet it was not altogether so. True, the young lady had been singing, to her own accompaniment on the guitar, one of those sweet airs which her lover the Marquis of Villebelle so delighted to hear poured forth in the delicious harmony of her melodious voice ; but when the guitar was laid aside, and although she still listlessly retained the music book in her hands, her thoughts became entirely concentrated on the image of him who possessed the worship of her heart.

Sweetly beautiful was Constance Farefield ; and she possessed a disposition which, if never subjected to the evil influences of fashionable life, and if never worked by the bad example of a mother, as displayed in circumstances already related, would have rendered her a being of signal virtue, propriety, and prudence. But she existed in an atmosphere where virtue is a flower that soon sickens, fades, and withers,—occasionally pining for a time ere it be blighted altogether, but, often perishing with the unwholesome heat at once.

On the present occasion Constance Farefield was meditating upon the promise which, as the reader is aware, she had a short time before made to the Marquis of Villebelle,—“that in the world's despite she would love him on unto the end,” and that so soon as

he had secured the means of guaranteeing an adequate maintenance for them both, she would become his wife—that is to say, she would accompany him to the altar, and go through the mockery of the marriage ceremony : for no sophistry could blind her eyes to the fact that the Marquis was married already. But as she pondered upon this promise which she had given, did she tremble ? did she experience remorse ? No : in her own thoughts and in her own resolves the Rubicon was already passed ; and she even longed—ardently and fervidly longed—for the coming of the hour that was to give her to the arms of Villebelle.

It is impossible to deny that the young lady's passions were excited and her imagination inflamed by certain things which had come to her knowledge. Was she not aware, from the conversation she had overheard between Mr. Gunthorpe and her mother, that the latter had offered to become the mistress of William Deveril, rather than resign the hope of gratifying the passion which she had conceived for that handsome young man ?—and as there were now no secrets between the sisters, had she not heard from Juliana the fact that this young lady, had abandoned herself up to the pleasures of a guilty love with Francis Paton ? Yes : nor had Juliana concealed from her the discovery of her amour by Lady Saxondale, and the flight of young page from the mansion. Thus was it that Constance had the evil examples of a mother and a sister before her eyes ; and as she contemplated them, it was natural that her own imagination should be excited. Therefore was it that with the delicacy which had at first characterised the love of Constance Farefield, thoughts and feelings of a grosser contexture imperceptibly and insidiously blended themselves ; and she looked forward with impatience for the day that was to make her the Marquis of Villebelle's own.

While thus giving way to her reflections, as she sat half reclining upon the sofa, the door opened, and Lady Saxondale entered the room. Constance blushed for a moment, fearing lest her thoughts should be penetrated by the keen eye of her mother : but instantly recovering her self-possession,—for she also was rapidly becoming an adept in hypocrisy,—she